Introduction: This report presents Rhode Island (RI) rates for 30 health-risk indicators for public high school students identifying themselves as either heterosexual or lesbian, gay, bisexual or unsure (LGBU). Data are from RI’s 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

About the YRBS: The YRBS is a bi-annual, anonymous, voluntary survey of a random sample of public high school students in the country. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed the YRBS to monitor risk behaviors related to the major causes of mortality, disease, and injury in the U.S.

RI’s YRBS: In the spring of 2009, 3,213 RI 9th to 12th grade students participated in the YRBS. The findings in this report are representative of public high school students statewide (excluding self-contained ESL and special education classes), and may be used to inform policy and programs alike regarding health-risk behaviors.

Sexual orientation: Students were asked "Which of the following best describes you? 1) heterosexual; 2) lesbian or gay; 3) bisexual, or 4) not sure." The responses were then parsed into two categories, students self-reporting either #1 (heterosexual), or #s 2, 3 or 4 (LGBU).

Understanding the data: This report presents bar charts showing percentages of students engaging in risky behaviors, along with the 95% confidence intervals (CIs provide the range of values among which the actual or ‘true’ value lies 95% of the time). Because survey data are estimates, the CIs are used to determine if there is any statistically significant difference between two (or more) groups. If the CIs overlap, one may not say with any certainty that the values between the two groups differ.

2009 Highlights
LGBU students were at greater risk for 25 of the 30 behaviors in this report than were heterosexual students, and there was a very strong (positive) correlation between a LGBU identity and engaging in risky behaviors ($r = 0.869$).

- Nine percent (9%) of RI public high school students identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or unsure (LGBU), and female students and those with physical, emotional or learning disabilities were more likely than their peers to identify as LGBU.
- Violence was more common to LGBU students, as 25% had been bullied (vs. 16% of heterosexual students), 35% had been in a physical fight (vs. 24%), and 19% had been hit by their boyfriend/girlfriend (vs. 10%) within the past 12 months. Sixteen percent (16%) of LGBU students were forced into sex (vs. 6%).
- ‘Depression’ rates were almost double among LGBU students (44% vs. 23%), and they were almost 4 times more likely than their heterosexual peers to have attempted suicide (22% vs. 6%).
- Tobacco use was higher among LGBU students, with current cigarette smoking at 28% (vs. 12% for heterosexual students), and any tobacco use at 29% (vs. 18%).
- LGBU students were more likely than heterosexual students to currently smoke marijuana (35% vs. 25%), have used cocaine (18% vs. 4%), sniffed inhalants (24% vs. 7%), or abused painkillers (36% vs. 15%). There was no difference in current alcohol drinking (34%).
- Recent sexual intercourse was more prevalent among LGBU than heterosexual students (44% vs. 31%), and LGBU students were more likely to have multiple (4+) partners (24% vs. 10%) and to engage in unsafe practices (i.e., without a condom, 56% vs. 37%).
- Obesity rates were higher among LGBU than heterosexual students (40% vs. 26%), with insufficient physical activity a possible contributing factor (71% vs. 54%), and they were more inclined to fast to maintain or reduce weight (21% vs. 10%).

Recommendations
These data show that LGBU students are much more likely to engage in risky behaviors than their heterosexual peers. Research also demonstrates that schools that focus on health and safety can dramatically increase academic performance. Consequently, the following recommendations are offered:

- Support policies and programs promoting self-esteem and diversity
- Adopt interventions addressing youth behavioral healthcare needs
- Integrate LGBU issues into academics
- Enforce LGBU anti-discrimination policies
- Increase screening and referral of at-risk LGBU youth

Acknowledgements: The RI Departments of Health; Elementary and Secondary Education; Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals; and the Office of Health and Human Services provided funding and other support for the YRBS. Contact information: RI Dept. of Health (401-222-5111), http://www.health.ri.gov/data/youthriskbehaviorsurvey/, or http://www.thriveri.org/. Prepared by: Bruce Cryan, MBA, MS, Donald Perry, MPA, Yongwen Jiang, PhD (RI-DoH), and Anne Marie Silvia, MPA (RI-DoE)
Figure 1
LGB/Unsure* Among RI Public High Schools
(Grades 9-12 students) within demographic subgroups -- 2009

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Source: 2009 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=3,213)

* LGB/Unsure: Students who describe their sexual orientation as Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Unsure
** Other: includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, multiple races
*** Primary Language: Students usually speak at home (English/Spanish/Portuguese/Cape Verdean Creole/Other)
Figure 2
Risk Behaviors Among RI Public High Schools
(Grades 9-12 students) by sexual orientation -- 2009

- Bars indicate 95% Confidence intervals (See page 1)

- Heterosexual(2,882)
- LGB/Unsure* (290)

Not Wear Seat Belt
never or rarely wear seat belt

Alcohol & Driving
1+ times drove car after drinking alcohol past 30 days

Carry Weapon
such as a gun/knife/club on 1+ day in the past 30 days

Not Go to School
due to unsafe feelings at school or on the way to/from school

Physical Fight
1+ more times during the past 12 months

Fighting at School
a physical fight on school property 1+ times past 12 mos

Hit by Boyfriend/Girlfriend
ever hit/strapped/physically hurt on purpose past 12 mos

Forced Sex
physically forced to have sexual intercourse when didn’t want

Ever Bullied
ever been bullied on school property past 12 months

Felt Sad or Hopeless
every day for two weeks/some usual activities past 12 mos

Attempted Suicide
attempted suicide 1+ times in past 12 mos

Ever Cigarette Use
ever tried cigarette smoking, even 1+ puffs

Current Cigarette Smoking
smoked cigarettes on 1+ of the past 30 days

Current Any Tobacco Use
cigarettes/cigars/hooking tobacco/nuff/dip on 1+ of past 30 days

Current Alcohol Drinking
1 drink of alcohol on 1+ of past 30 days

Source: 2009 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n=3,213)
* LGB/Unsure: Students who describe their sexual orientation as Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Unsure
Figure 3
Risk Behaviors Among RI Public High Schools
(Grades 9-12 students) by sexual orientation -- 2009

- Ever Marijuana Use
  - used marijuana 1+ times during lifetime
  - 139
  - 150

- Current Marijuana Use
  - 1+ times used marijuana during the past 30 days
  - 125
  - 135

- Ever Used Cocaine
  - including powder/crack/freebase 1+ times during lifetime
  - 4
  - 18

- Ever Sniffed Inhalants
  - inhaled paint/spray/glue to get high 1+ times during lifetime
  - 7
  - 24

- Ever Taken Painkillers
  - without Dr's prescription 1+ times during lifetime
  - 15
  - 136

- Sexual Intercourse Ever
  - ever had sexual intercourse
  - 143
  - 159

- Sexual Intercourse With 4+ People
  - had sexual intercourse during the past 3 months
  - 10
  - 24

- Recent Sexual Intercourse
  - with 1+ people during the past 3 months
  - 131
  - 144

- No Condom Use
  - not used condom during last sexual intercourse
  - 12
  - 20

- No/Unsure Had AIDS/HIV Education
  - not been taught about AIDS or HIV infection in school
  - 12
  - 20

- Overweight/Obesity
  - >= 5th percentile for body mass index**, by age and sex
  - 10
  - 21

- Fasting to Lose/Maintain Weight
  - without eating 24+ hours during the past 30 days
  - 10
  - 21

- Insufficient Physical Activity
  - for total of >=60 mins/day on 5+ days of past 7 days
  - 10
  - 21

- Dr. Check-up
  - saw a Dr. for a check-up when not sick/injured past 12 mos
  - 10
  - 60

- Emotional/Learning Disabilities
  - long term (6+ mos) emotional problems/learning disabilities
  - 10
  - 31

Source: 2009 Rhode Island Youths Risk Behavior Survey (n=3,213)

* LGB/Unsure: Students who describe their sexual orientation as Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Unsure
** Body Mass Index = weight in kilograms / (height in meters)²