

BRFSS Brief

Number 2022-02

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an annual telephone survey of adults developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and several US Territories. The New York BRFSS is administered by the New York State Department of Health to provide statewide and regional information on behaviors, risk factors, and use of preventive health services related to the leading causes of chronic and infectious diseases, disability, injury, and death.

Sun Exposure and Sunburn New York State Adults, 2019

Introduction and Key Findings

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States (US). The main types of skin cancer are squamous cell carcinoma, basal cell carcinoma, and melanoma.¹ Melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, is the ninth most common type of cancer reported among both men and women in New York State (NYS).² For NYS adults ages 20 to 34 years, melanoma ranks among the top four cancers. More than 4,000 New Yorkers are diagnosed with melanoma and nearly 500 New Yorkers die from melanoma each year.³ It's estimated that by 2040, melanoma will surpass colorectal and lung cancers to become the second most common cancer type in the US.⁴

Most cases of skin cancer, including melanoma, are caused by too much exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun, tanning beds, or sunlamps. UV rays can damage skin cells, which in the short term can cause a sunburn. Over time, UV damage adds up, leading to changes in skin texture, premature skin aging, and sometimes skin cancer.

Many melanoma and non-melanoma skin cancers can be prevented by reducing exposure to UV rays and avoiding sunburns. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following sun-protective behaviors when outside to reduce the risk of skin cancer: staying in the shade under an umbrella, tree, or other shelter; wearing protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts and pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses; and applying a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher before going outside and reapplying after swimming or sweating.⁵

Key Findings

One in three adults (33.6%) in NYS report rarely or never using sun protection when outside on a warm sunny day for more than an hour. Lack of practicing sun-protective behaviors is higher among adults who are living within New York City (NYC) (38.5%), are men (39.0%), are Hispanic (38.3%) or Black, non-Hispanic (43.6%), have lower educational attainment (43.4%), earn an annual household income less than \$25,000 (43.0%), are living with disability (39.2%), report frequent mental distress (44.0%), are current smokers (45.3%), and are physically inactive (40.2%).

Nearly 30% of adults in NYS report having had at least one sunburn in the past twelve months. The prevalence of sunburn is higher among adults who live outside of NYC (32.9%), are white, non-Hispanic (39.2%), are 18-24 years old (46.8%), are college graduates (34.9%), earn an annual household income of \$50,000 or more (37.6%), are living without disability (31.7%), and are physically active (31.9%). The prevalence of sunburn reported among adults who are binge or heavy drinkers (41.8%) is nearly double the prevalence reported among non-binge or heavy drinkers (25.1%).

BRFSS Questions

1. When you go outside on a warm sunny day for more than an hour, how often do you protect yourself from the sun?
2. During the past 12 months, how many times have you had a sunburn?

Figure 1. Prevalence of rarely or never using sun protection when outside on a warm sunny day for more than one hour by sex, race/ethnicity, annual household income, disability status, and current smoker status, BRFSS 2019

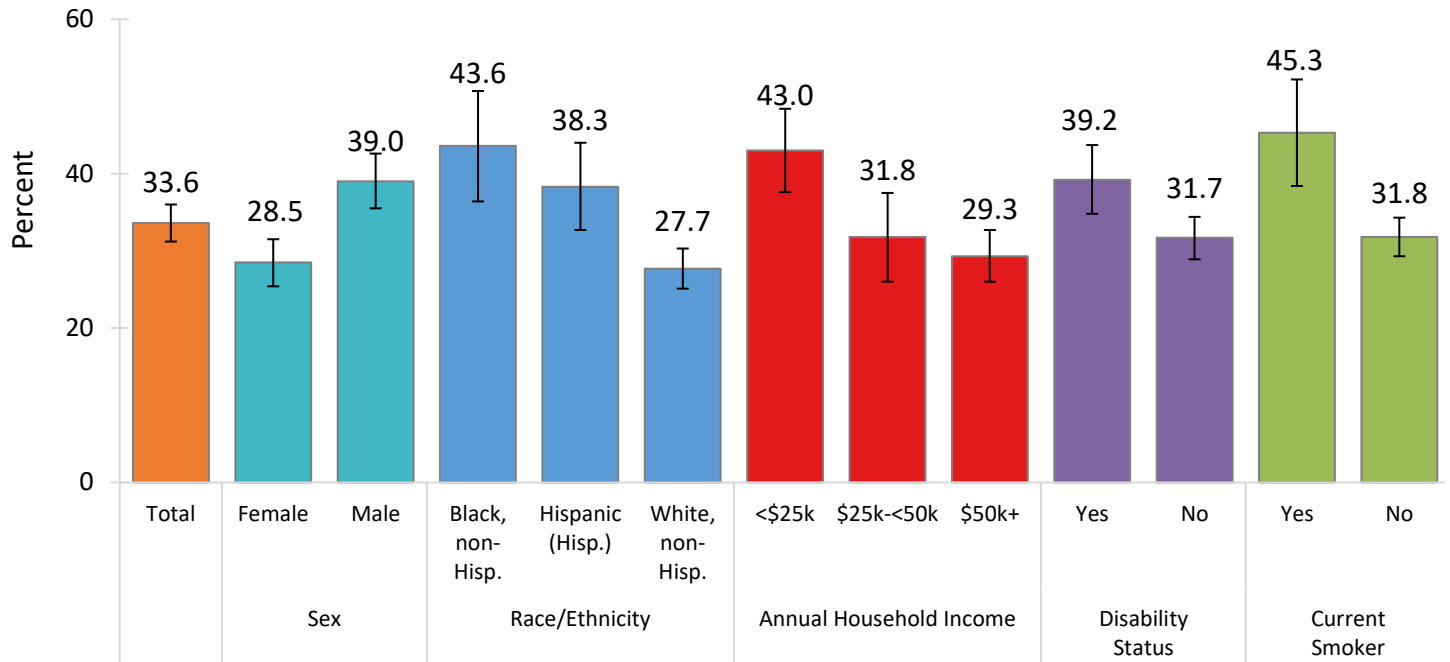


Figure 2. Prevalence of at least one sunburn in the last 12 months by region, race/ethnicity, annual household income, and educational attainment, BRFSS 2019

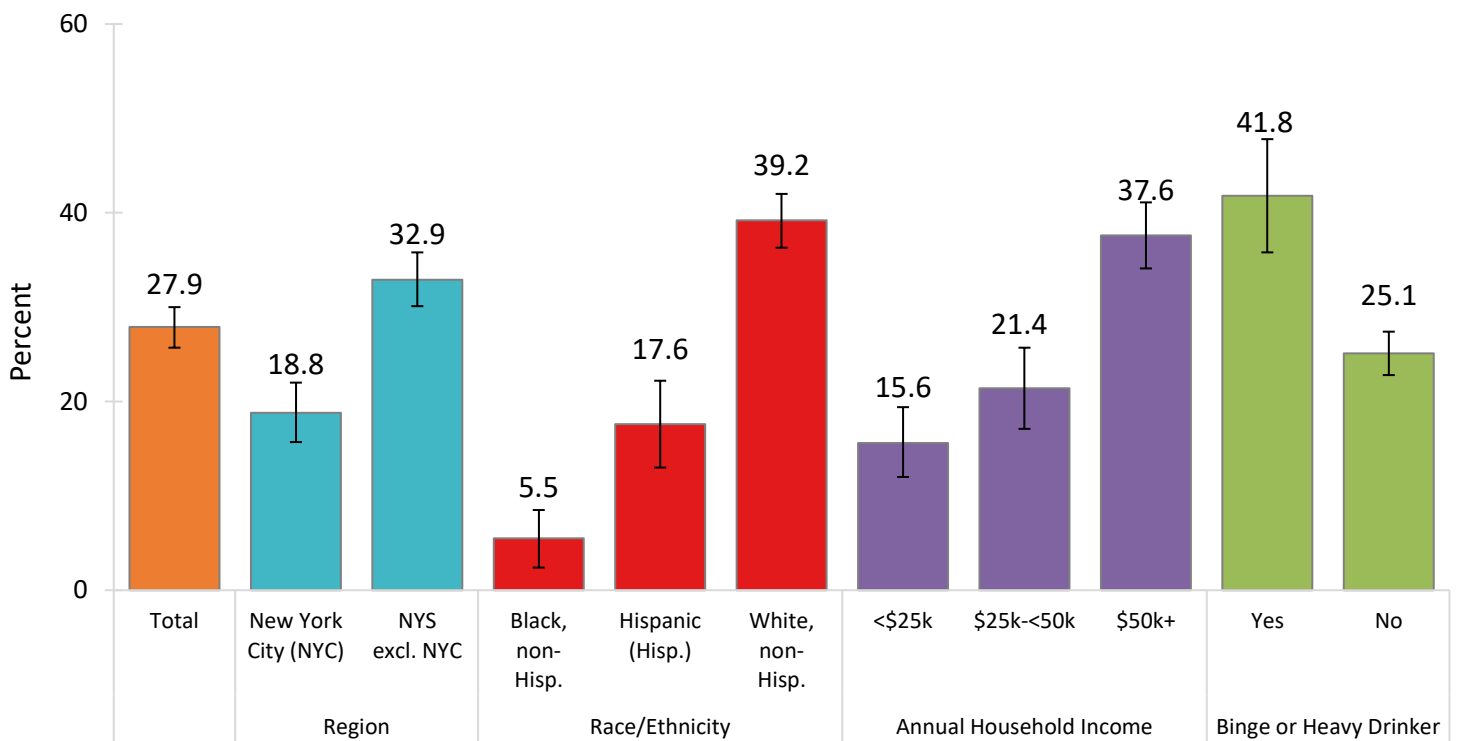


Table 1. Prevalence of rarely or never using sun protection when outside on a warm sunny day for more than one hour and prevalence of sunburn in past 12 months by selected demographics in NYS, BRFSS 2019

	Rarely or Never Use Sun Protection		Sunburned in Past 12 Months	
	% ^a	95% CI ^a	% ^a	95% CI ^a
Total NYS [N=14,232]	33.6	31.2-36.0	27.9	25.7-30.0
Region				
New York City (NYC)	38.5	34.2-42.7	18.8	15.7-22.0
NYS excluding NYC	30.9	28.1-33.7	32.9	30.1-35.8
Sex^b				
Female	28.5	25.4-31.5	25.6	22.8-28.4
Male	39.0	35.5-42.6	30.2	26.9-33.6
Race, Ethnicity				
Black, non-Hispanic	43.6	36.4-50.7	5.5	2.4-8.5
Hispanic	38.3	32.7-44.0	17.6	13.0-22.2
Other race or multiracial, non-Hispanic ^c	- ^d	- ^d	16.2	8.4-24.0
White, non-Hispanic	27.7	25.1-30.3	39.2	36.3-42.0
Age (years)				
18-24	38.0	29.0-47.1	46.8	37.0-56.7
25-64	34.9	31.9-37.8	30.4	27.8-33.1
65+	28.1	24.3-31.9	12.5	10.3-14.8
Educational Attainment				
Less than high school	43.4	35.4-51.4	13.3	7.5-19.0
High school or GED	40.6	35.6-45.6	27.9	23.1-32.8
Some post-high school	33.4	28.9-37.9	26.3	22.3-30.2
College graduate	25.1	21.8-28.4	34.9	31.4-38.4
Annual Household Income				
Less than \$25,000	43.0	37.6-48.4	15.6	12.0-19.4
\$25,000-\$49,999	31.8	26.0-37.5	21.4	17.1-25.7
\$50,000 or more	29.3	26.0-32.7	37.6	34.1-41.1
Missing ^e	34.8	29.3-40.2	23.5	18.5-28.5
Employment Status				
Employed/self-employed	32.6	29.4-35.8	33.3	30.3-36.1
Unemployed	-	-	27.9	18.2-37.6
Not in labor force	33.3	29.6-37.0	20.4	17.1-23.7
Disability Status^f				
Yes	39.2	34.8-43.7	18.3	15.0-21.5
No	31.7	28.9-34.4	31.7	29.0-34.4
Frequent Mental Distress^g				
Yes	44.0	36.9-51.1	32.5	25.5-39.5
No	32.2	29.7-34.7	27.6	25.2-29.9
Current Smoker^h				
Yes	45.3	38.4-52.2	27.1	20.8-33.4
No	31.8	29.3-34.3	28.1	25.8-30.4
Binge or Heavy Drinker				
Yes	36.5	30.6-42.3	41.8	35.8-47.8
No	33.1	30.4-35.7	25.1	22.8-27.4
Physically Inactiveⁱ				
Yes	40.2	35.7-44.8	16.7	13.6-19.9
No	31.2	28.5-34.0	31.9	29.2-34.6

^a%= Weighted percentage; 95% CI= 95% confidence interval. ^bBased on respondent's sex at birth or current gender identity at time of interview if sex at birth is missing. ^cIncludes American Indian, Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Other, or Multiracial. ^dRows that contain a confidence interval with a half-width or greater than 10 have been suppressed. ^e“Missing” category included because more than 10% of the sample did not report income. ^fRespondents who reported at least one type of disability (cognitive, self-care, independent living, vision, mobility, or hearing). ^gFrequent mental distress is defined as yes if respondents reported problems with stress, depression, or emotions on at least 14 of the previous 30 days. ^hCurrent smoker is an adult over age 18 who has smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and currently smokes on at least some days. ⁱPhysically inactive is defined as yes if respondents reported no leisure-time physical activity during the past month.

References

1. National Cancer Institute. Skin Cancer. Retrieved on July 29, 2021. <https://www.cancer.gov/types/skin>.
2. New York State Department of Health, Skin Cancer in New York State, Tenth Annual Report, 2017. https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/diseases/cancer/skin/report/docs/2017_report.pdf.
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4. Rahib L, Wehner MR, Matrisian LM, Nead KT. Estimated Projection of US Cancer Incidence and Death to 2040. JAMA 2021;4(4):e214708.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Sun Safety. Retrieved on July 29, 2021. https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/sun-safety.htm.

Program Contributions

New York State Department of Health
Bureau of Chronic Disease Evaluation and Research
Bureau of Cancer Prevention and Control

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