



Assessing the Health Readiness of Active Component Coast Guardsmen

Results from Coast Guard Respondents to the HRBS



The **Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS)** is the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) flagship survey for understanding the health, health-related behaviors, and well-being of service members.

- The HRBS allows leadership to better understand the health-related readiness of the force.
- The HRBS is used to facilitate benchmarking in combination with Healthy People benchmarks (designed for the general U.S. population).
- Results are weighted to represent the 2018 active component.

Comparison with the U.S. General Population

The 2018 HRBS shows that active component Coast Guardsmen generally reported comparable or better health and health behaviors than the general population, with some areas of concern.

Coast Guardsmen nearly met Healthy People 2020 goals for normal weight and met these goals for obesity. Their rates of illicit drug use and prescription drug misuse were low. Their mental and emotional health indicators were similar to those of the general population.

Among areas of concern for Coast Guardsmen are their levels of alcohol, tobacco, and nicotine use. Their rates of binge drinking exceeded those of the general population and Healthy People 2020 goals. Their levels of tobacco or nicotine product use also exceeded those for the general population and applicable Healthy People 2020 goals.

Development of military-appropriate population benchmarks, especially by service branch, could facilitate goal-setting, command visibility, and incremental improvements in health-related readiness.

Limitations

A low overall response rate (19.2 percent for the Coast Guard and 9.6 percent across all services) suggests that the results should be interpreted with caution and in conjunction with other existing data. Use of targeted incentives, modules administered to subsets of respondents, or a service member panel survey could help improve response rates and representation. The above comparisons with the general adult population do not control for demographic differences between the two populations.



Weight and Sleep Issues



66.6% were **overweight or obese**, according to body mass index



42.4% met **age-appropriate sleep quantity** requirements



21.9% were moderately or severely bothered by **sleep-related lack of energy**



6.5% took **sleep medications** to help them sleep at least three times weekly

Mental and Emotional Health



6.0% met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 30 days

10.6% met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 12 months

7.3% met criteria for **probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** in the past 30 days

4.7% had **thought about attempting suicide** in the past 12 months

0.2% reported a **suicide attempt** in the past 12 months

4.3% **needed mental health services** in the past 12 months **but did not receive them**

19.3% reported **mental health service use** in the past 12 months

31.3% said that seeking military mental health **treatment damages one's military career**

Substance Use



Alcohol, Tobacco, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription Drugs

33.9% had engaged in **binge drinking** in the past 30 days (five or more drinks for men or four or more for women on one occasion)

7.8% were **heavy drinkers** (binge drinking at least one or two days a week in the past 30 days)

19.1% viewed **military culture as supportive of drinking**

35.4% reported any **current tobacco or nicotine use**

14.0% were **current cigarette smokers**

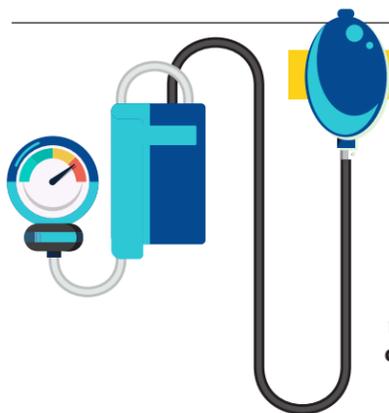
11.8% were **current smokeless tobacco users**

14.9% were **current e-cigarette users**

0.8% reported **illicit drug use** (mostly marijuana or synthetic cannabis) in the past 12 months

0.5% reported **prescription drug misuse** in the past 12 months (use without a prescription or use in greater amounts, more frequently, or for longer than prescribed)

Physical Health and Functional Limitations



34.4% reported one or more **chronic medical conditions** (e.g., high blood pressure) in the past 12 months



20.6% reported that **pain** (including headaches) had bothered them a lot over the past 30 days



3.6% screened positive for **mild traumatic brain injury**

Sexual Behavior and Health

15.4% had **more than one sexual partner** in the past 12 months

32.9% had sex with a new partner **without using a condom** in the past 12 months

2.6% reported contracting a **sexually transmitted infection** in the past 12 months

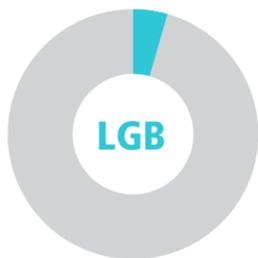
17.0% were at **high risk** for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

16.4% of those not expecting or trying to conceive a child **did not use birth control** during their most recent vaginal sex in the past 12 months

1.3% reported having or causing an **unintended pregnancy** in the past 12 months



Sexual Orientation, Identity, and Health

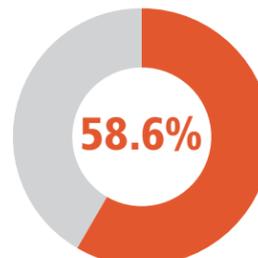


4.7% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (**LGB**)

Significantly greater percentages of LGB personnel than non-LGB personnel reported serious psychological distress and probable PTSD, suicidal thoughts and attempts, binge and heavy drinking, e-cigarette and smokeless tobacco use, illicit drug use, and unwanted sexual contact. * These results are not specific to the Coast Guard.

* Unwanted sexual contact in the HRBS is a broader construct than sexual assault, and these survey responses do not represent official reports of sexual assault.

Deployment Experiences and Health



reported at least one **prior combat or noncombat deployment**

Among those who had ever deployed:

26.2% reported at least **one lifetime combat deployment**

17.3% reported past **exposure to combat trauma** (e.g., knowing someone wounded in combat)

53.1% reported a **deployment in the past 12 months**



Adapted from 2018 Department of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS): Results for the Active Component, by Sarah O. Meadows, Charles C. Engel, Rebecca L. Collins, Robin L. Beckman, Joshua Breslau, Erika Litvin Bloom, Michael Stephen Dunbar, Mary Lou Gilbert, David Grant, Jennifer Hawes-Dawson, Stephanie Brooks Holliday, Sarah MacCarthy, Eric R. Pedersen, Michael W. Robbins, Adam J. Rose, Jamie Ryan, Terry L. Schell, and Molly Simmons, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4222-OSD, 2021. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. For the complete report detailing these and other findings, visit www.rand.org/t/RR4222.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights: This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.html.

To view this infographic online, visit www.rand.org/t/IG147z2.