For active component service members

DoD HEALTH RELATED BEHAVIORS SURVEY

Assessing the Health Readiness of Active Component Marines

Results from Marine Corps Respondents to the HRBS

RAND CORPORATION

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 Marines met or surpassed weight goals for the general population. The proportion of Marines who were obese is below the Healthy People 2020 target for the general population, while the proportion who were of normal weight is above the target.

Marines present many other health concerns, however. Few reported getting adequate amounts of sleep. Their levels of binge and heavy drinking were above Healthy People 2020 targets and general population levels. Their levels of use of tobacco and nicotine products were above Healthy People 2020 targets. Their levels of serious psychological stress and probable PTSD were above general population rates. Their rates of suicidal ideation and attempts were greater than those for the general population. Many Marines reported engaging in risky sexual behaviors; Marines were more likely, for example, than members of the general population to have sex with a new partner without using a condom.

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 (6.1 percent for the Marine Corps 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

57.8% were **overweight** or **obese**, according to body mass index

27.3% met **age-appropriate sleep quantity** requirements

30.8% were moderately or severely bothered by **sleep-related lack of energy**

6.9% took **sleep medications** to help them sleep at least three times weekly

Mental and Emotional Health

12.8% met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 30 days

19.6% met criteria for **serious psychological distress** in the past 12 months

15.1% met criteria for **probable posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** in the past 30 days

10.1% had **thought about attempting suicide** in the past 12 months

1.6% reported a **suicide attempt** in the past 12 months

6.9% **needed mental health services** in the past 12 months **but did not receive them**

24.9% reported **mental health service use** in the past 12 months

36.1% said that seeking military mental health **treatment damages one's military career**

Substance Use

Alcohol, Tobacco, Illicit Drugs, and Prescription Drugs

44.9% 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)

15.3% were **heavy drinkers** (binge drinking at least one or two days a week in the past 30 days)

34.0% viewed **military culture** as **supportive of drinking**

49.0% reported any **current tobacco or nicotine use**

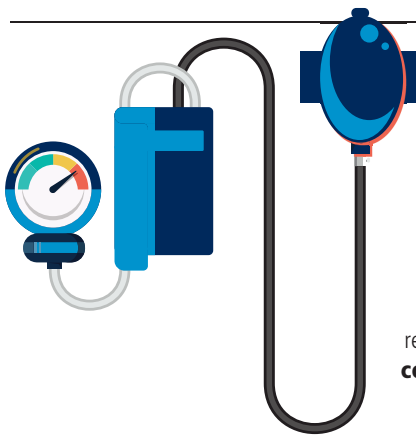
27.7% were **current cigarette smokers**

19.8% were **current smokeless tobacco users**

22.6% were **current e-cigarette users**

2.5% reported **illicit drug use** (mostly marijuana or synthetic cannabis) in the past 12 months

1.6% 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

39.8% reported one or more **chronic medical conditions** (e.g., high blood pressure) in the past 12 months

35.6% reported that **pain** (including headaches) had bothered them a lot over the past 30 days

6.8% screened positive for **mild traumatic brain injury**

Sexual Behavior and Health

25.6% had **more than one sexual partner** in the past 12 months

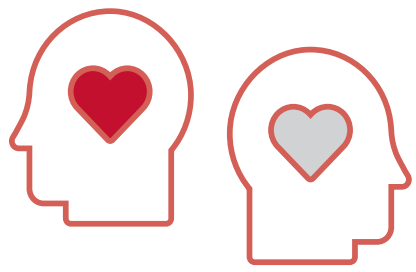
42.3% had sex with a new partner **without using a condom** in the past 12 months

4.0% reported contracting a **sexually transmitted infection** in the past 12 months

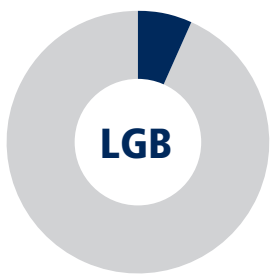
27.8% were at **high risk** for human immunodeficiency virus (**HIV**)

16.9% 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

3.5% reported having or causing an **unintended pregnancy** in the past 12 months



Sexual Orientation, Identity, and Health

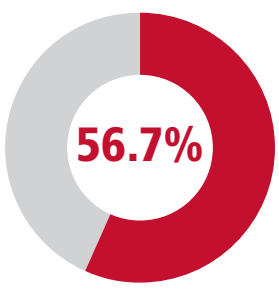


5.5% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (**LGB**)

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 Marine Corps.

* 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:

55.8% reported at least **one lifetime combat deployment**

37.7% reported past **exposure to combat trauma** (e.g., knowing someone wounded in combat)

55.3% 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. *This infographic was updated in July 2026 to correct a coding error that impacted calculations of the prevalence of probable PTSD.*

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