GSHS
Global School-Based Student Health Survey

Information for the Local Ethical Review Committee
Following recommendations by the Pan American Health Organization's Ethical review Committee (PAHOERC), the GSHS has to be reviewed and approved by a Local Ethical Review Committee (LERC) in each participating country. The GSHS core questionnaire has been already approved by PAHOERC. Given that each country can add new questions to the core GSHS, PAHOERC requires the review and approval by the LERC of the final GSHS questionnaire –including new country questions- prior to the administration of the GSHS.

PAHO's publication *Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects* and forms to be filled out by the LERC are available at [http://www.paho.org/English/HDP/HDR/rpg/](http://www.paho.org/English/HDP/HDR/rpg/)

Following is a summary of relevant aspects from the GSHS to be considered by the LERC.

**Summary**

The purpose of the GSHS is to monitor the prevalence of important health risk behaviors and protective factors among students 13 to 15 years of age to support regional and national school health and youth health programs.

The GSHS core questionnaire modules were developed through a 15-month collaborative process involving more than 50 individuals representing WHO (the Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health Department and the Family and Community Health Department), WHO Regions (AFRO, AMRO, EMRO, EURO, SEARO, and WPRO), WHO Collaborating Center (CDC and Education Development Center), other United Nations Agencies (UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNAIDS), non-governmental organizations (Education International), and more than 15 countries, plus scientists in the health behaviors topics measured from WHO, CDC, and elsewhere. The process began with a detailed review of the international youth survey literature. In many cases, GSHS core questions were adopted from existing international surveys, particularly those for which positive psychometric data already existed. Core questionnaire modules for the GSHS were pre-tested in Brazil, China, Venezuela, Chile, and Zambia during the summer of 2002.

PAHO, in coordination with WHO headquarters and the CDC and the countries, plans to implement the GSHS in combination with the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS). Both surveys share the same sampling design, and survey administration methodology. However, the GSHS and the GYTS will be applied to different classes within the same school. By doing so, both surveys are expected to be completed in a single class period, over a reasonable student’s attention span of around 45 minutes and without interfering much with regular school activities. The GYTS has been implemented since 1999 in the Americas with approval of the PAHOERC.

A scientific sample of schools with students aged 13-15 years is selected. The probability of a school being selected is based on the number of students enrolled who
are in this age range. Within each sampled school, a random sample of classrooms is selected. All students in a sampled classroom are asked to participate in the GSHS.

Students are asked to fill out a questionnaire that takes about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. Students take the survey only once. Students who participate cannot be tracked because their names are not on the questionnaire or answer sheet.

Survey administration procedures are designed to protect student privacy and allow for anonymous participation. Students do not put their names on the GSHS Questionnaire or GSHS Answer Sheet. The GSHS Answer Sheet contains no personal information that could be used to identify individual students. When students finish the GSHS Questionnaire, they place their GSHS Answer Sheet in a large box along with the GSHS Answer Sheets from all the other students in the classroom. The GSHS is administered by specially trained Survey Administrators. Teachers are not involved directly in survey administration. Published reports do not include names of participating schools or students.

Doing the GSHS questionnaire poses little or no risk to students. The only possible risk is that some students might find some questions to be sensitive. Participation by students in the GSHS is voluntary. No action will be taken against the school, parents, or a student, if a student does not take part. Students can skip any question that they do not wish to answer. In addition, students may stop participating in the survey at any point without penalty.

Students get no benefit right away from taking part in the GSHS. However, the results of this survey will help students and other youth in the future. The GSHS is part of PAHO’s Health-Promoting Schools Regional Initiative (HPRSI), thus school health experts are involved in the review of the questionnaire and will be able to use the results to improve school health programs. Additionally, technical and financial support for implementation of the GSHS is provided by other units and programs at PAHO, involving HIV/AIDS, adolescents’ health, violence and injury prevention, alcohol and drugs, nutrition and physical activity, and tobacco. This broad support to the GSHS in the Americas provides additional opportunities to the Ministries of Health and Education for data-driven programming of school health projects and activities in every country in the Region.

Schools and students are invited to participate in the GSHS. The Survey Coordinator sends a letter inviting schools to participate in the survey to the principal/head master of the school (Annex 8). Once a school has agreed to participate in the GSHS, the Survey Coordinator or Survey Administrator works with the school contact to schedule the date and time for survey administration, obtain a list of all eligible classrooms that can be used for sampling classrooms, and determine which form of consent - notification or approval - from parents/guardians of students in the sampled classrooms is most appropriate.
Parental/guardian consent is obtained using parental/guardian notification or approval forms (see samples in Annex 10 and 11). Parental/guardian notification and approval processes typically depend on local laws, policies, and standard practices. The National Steering Committee, including representatives from the Ministries of Health and Education is to determine the best process for some or all schools in the country. For some schools, a parental/guardian notification or approval form may be sent home with each student; in other instances, forms may be mailed to the home. Regardless, of the method chosen for obtaining parental/guardian consent, the Survey Coordinator or Survey Administrator will ensure that the form is received in the home 3 to 4 days prior to survey administration.

The GSHS is made up of three blocks of questions designed at global, regional and country levels. Globally, the basic core GSHS questionnaire contains 54 standard questions which are required for every participating country in the world. At Regional level, PAHO -in consultation with WHO and CDC- added 12 questions which are also required with no changes for all countries in the Americas Region. Finally, each country has the option to add a few extra questions in accordance to their needs and priorities. In turn, the global core and regional questions of the GSHS will be the same to allow for comparison of results among all countries in the Americas Region.

Additional general information about the GSHS is available at http://www.who.int/chp/gshs/en/