



# Alert:

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## Young Epidemiology Scholars Compete in Nation's Capital

Sixty high school students from around the country traveled to Washington, D.C., in late April to compete in the finals of the Young Epidemiology Scholars (YES) Competition. They arrived in the capital ready to showcase the results of their research on a wide range of topics, including the impact of autistic children on a family, the connection between marching band participation and student sickness, the correlation between asthma and obesity, and yogurt as a secret weapon against childhood illnesses. Timely topics new to the competition this year included the Avian Flu Pandemic and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Two scholarships of \$50,000 each were awarded to the first-place winners—one to Natalia Nazarewicz from Tennessee whose survey of high

school students identified surprisingly high rates of self-inflicted harm, and one to Aman Prasad from Idaho who found that students who exercised vigorously three or more days a week had better moods than those who did not exercise. The national winners were chosen by a panel of judges that included some of the nation's top epidemiologists and educators. In total, nearly \$460,000 in scholarships are awarded each year.

"I gained a real understanding of what epidemiologists do and how much they contribute to public health," says Emily Lefkowitz, of Suffern, New York, who received a \$35,000 scholarship. "I was amazed by the quality of the research projects and most impressed by the judges—their incredible passion and commitment."

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**"The YES Competition encourages students to use the skills employed by epidemiologists to tackle important health challenges."**

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey,  
M.D., M.B.A.  
President and CEO,  
Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation



Young  
Epidemiology  
Scholars

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Natalia Nazarewicz



Aman Prasad

### First Place \$50,000 Scholarship

**Natalia Nazarewicz**  
Oak Ridge, TN

**Deliberate Self-Harm Among Adolescents: Prevalence, Risk Factors and Treatment Options**  
*"I talked with some high school guidance counselors and student advisors after completing my study, and they were shocked by the scope of the problem. A few teachers and administrators didn't even know that the self-harm phenomenon existed, and were shocked to hear that students would deliberately injure themselves."*

**Aman Prasad**  
Pocatello, ID

**Physical Activity and Mood in Adolescents**  
*"I've become quite interested in depression, specifically in adolescents. Finding novel means of mitigating the negative effects of mood disorders is essential, and I wanted my research to involve that aspect. After jogging or exercising, I would notice a sudden uplift in my mood and my outlook on the rest of the day. I confirmed this with other friends who agreed that they felt better if they exercised and felt 'down' if they didn't."*

### Second Place \$35,000 Scholarship

**Elizabeth Baker**  
Tucson, AZ

**The Bi-Orbital Rotational Therapy Swing: A New Hope for Children With ADHD**

**Emily Lefkowitz**  
Suffern, NY

**Living with Impairment: Behavioral, Emotional and Social Adjustment of Neurotypical Siblings of Children with Autism**

### Third Place \$20,000 Scholarship

**Soumya Irivinti**  
Derry, NH

**An Epidemiological Study of Psychosocial Discomfort and Exercise Frequency in High School Students**

**Nozlee Samadzadeh**  
Oklahoma City, OK

**SIORSS: Simulation of an Influenza Outbreak in a Residential School Setting**

### National Finalists \$15,000 Scholarship

**Christina Badal**  
Boca Raton, FL

**Weight Goals in a High School-Age Population**

**Erica Berck**  
Roslyn Heights, NY

**Factors Predicting Adolescent Sexual Permissiveness**

**Katrina Diaz**  
Kalamazoo, MI

**Factors Associated with the Parental Decision to Vaccinate Infants, Toddlers, and Early School-Age Children Against Influenza**

**Amy Gillio**  
Lancaster, PA

**The Relative Risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms as a Function of Exposure to Hurricane Katrina**

**Ashley Richardson**  
Frederick, MD

**The Impact of a Scheduled Hand Washing Policy in Elementary Schools on Student Health**

**Erin Vickery**  
Decatur, GA

**Underage Alcohol Consumption: Parent Perception vs. Student Reality**

### Regional Finalists

48 students received \$2,000 scholarships

### Regional Semifinalists

63 students received \$1,000 scholarships

Read more about the students online at [www.collegeboard.com/yes](http://www.collegeboard.com/yes)



Young  
Epidemiology  
Scholars





The 60 high school finalists in the 2005-06 YES competition traveled to Washington, D.C., in April to present the results of their epidemiological studies. A panel of judges presented awards to winners and finalists.



## Young Epidemiology Scholars Compete in Nation's Capital *(continued from page 1)*

Supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and administered by the College Board, the YES Competition is designed to inspire students to investigate the many behavioral, biological, environmental and social factors that affect public health. This year's competition attracted nearly 700 entries from high school juniors and seniors in all 50 states, plus American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.

"The YES Competition encourages students to use the skills employed by epidemiologists to tackle important health challenges," says Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., president and chief executive officer of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "We couldn't be prouder of the initiative, talent and hard work these students have displayed during this competition. We know they're going to be difference-makers, dedicated to improving the lives of others."

**William H. Foege, M.D., M.P.H.**

Leading epidemiologist and keynote speaker at the 2005-'06 YES Competition awards dinner



In 1979, the World Health Organization declared that smallpox had been conquered—the first and

only disease ever eliminated by public health action. This was a virus so deadly it had killed between 300 million and 500 million people in the 20th century.

The man driving the effort to wipe out smallpox was epidemiologist Dr. Bill Foege. As a medical missionary in Nigeria in the 1960s, he had seen the devastation caused by a raging smallpox epidemic. He and his colleagues fought back by developing a targeted strategy—identifying the virus's causes, discerning likely routes of transmission, and setting out with vaccines to the "hot zones." The epidemic was stopped in its tracks.

In 1977, Dr. Foege became director of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), where he served until 1983. In 1984, Dr. Foege helped form the Task Force on Child Survival and Development, which spearheaded a worldwide immunization effort that reached 80 percent of all children. Dr. Foege also has taken an active role in the effort to eradicate Guinea worm, polio, measles, and river blindness.

"You now have a glimpse of epidemiology," Foege told the YES participants at their award dinner, "and it's going to change the way you think. Many of you will apply that knowledge in the future by trying to reduce health risks, enhance education and agriculture, and improve the lives of people."

In 1986, Dr. Foege became director of the Carter Center, and in 1997, he joined the faculty at Emory University. In 1999, he began working on immunization efforts with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Now retired, he remains active as a Gates Fellow and as Emeritus Presidential Distinguished Professor of International Health at Emory.

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## 2006-07 Competition

## Guidelines available

July 1, 2006

## Online submission

deadline February 1,  
2007 by 5:00 pm ET

## YES national event

April 2007

## A YES judge reflects on the competition and the future of the field.

### Shiriki Kumanyika, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Professor of Epidemiology  
Director of the Graduate Program in Public  
Health Studies  
University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine

**Dr. Kumanyika has a unique interdisciplinary background that integrates epidemiology, nutrition, prevention, minority health, aging and women's health issues. Her main research themes concern the role of nutritional factors in the prevention of chronic diseases, with a particular focus on obesity, sodium reduction and related health problems such as hypertension and diabetes. She has served on numerous national advisory committees and international task forces and has lectured and published widely. Dr. Kumanyika holds a B.A. from Syracuse University, a Master of Science in Social Work from Columbia University, a Ph.D. in Human Nutrition from Cornell University and a Master of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University.**

**Q:** How did you get involved in epidemiology?

**A:** I was pursuing a Ph.D. in nutrition, and while I had read a lot of epidemiological studies, I didn't really know what the field was. I had a mentor who was a senior person in nutrition. He had a way of thinking that was incredibly clear. He seemed to know exactly how to figure things out. At first I thought this was just the way he thought, and then I realized that you could learn to think this way, that you could use these tools for many fields. It was like a Eureka! moment for me. That's when I decided to study public health.

**Q:** Why should high school students get involved in the field?

**A:** People tend to think of public health as something for mature, advanced professionals. But epidemiology is about clear thinking and finding patterns, so why not the sooner the better? I was invited to be a YES judge, and I was intrigued by the idea that it involved high school students. I love epidemiology and always love the chance to think about these issues, so how nice to be a judge!

**Q:** What impressed you about the YES students?

**A:** I was amazed at the sophistication of the projects. Often during the judging, I kept saying, these are high school students! I could easily imagine that they were college students. The level of thinking and the way they approached it were excellent.

**Q:** Why is the YES Competition important?

**A:** There's a tremendous need for epidemiologists, especially those who learned the basic skills while they were young and creative. Through this competition, we can attract some of the smartest students and draw a new audience into public health. Plus, if we could get epidemiology into the high schools, we could have a much more informed public. It's a way of teaching critical thinking, of looking for meaning in the data. That's good for education and good for the country in general.

**Q:** What kinds of traits do you think will lead to success in epidemiology?

**A:** Epidemiologists come from many backgrounds, but they all love to think. They're not satisfied with the first version of an answer, or the second, or the third. They have ideas and rip them apart, turn them inside out, and see if some explanation has gone unnoticed. Some people thrive on that and the challenge of it—those are the people we need. Young people are ideal because they are freewheeling and they understand the new trends in society. They can have tremendous impact, contributing to society by answering important questions.

**Q:** Any advice for students?

**A:** If you're interested in health, explore epidemiology, because it's a fundamental science for understanding health problems. But no matter what you're interested in, learn something about epidemiological thinking. It will benefit almost anything you do in life.



Shiriki Kumanyika, Ph.D.,  
M.P.H., judging the 2005-06  
competition

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