

# 7th grade

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## Experts agree it's worst period in a kid's life

WASHINGTON (AP) — Warning: seventh grade can be hazardous to your health.

The federal government isn't going to require that admonition on every classroom blackboard, but its health and education experts agree the seventh grade can be rough physically and emotionally for the four million youngsters who pass through it each year.

A federal study released last week found that school violence and vandalism peak in the seventh grade. The 12- and 13-year-olds are the most likely to be attacked — and to be the attackers — of all junior and senior high students.

Health planners pinpoint the seventh grade as a crucial time for youngsters in deciding whether to smoke. A new federal anti-smoking campaign being unveiled Wednesday is expected to aim at discouraging these youngsters from picking up the habit.

And 62 percent of all seventh graders, according to one study, have at least tried alcohol. In a 1975 survey, more than 11 percent said they were heavy or moderately heavy drinkers.

Why is the seventh grade such a troublesome time?

"It's the worst period in a kid's life. He doesn't have his life figured out," said Roy Nehrt, an official of the National Center for Education Statistics and a former junior high school teacher in St. Louis. "He's under all kinds of pressures from all sides, and he can't cope with them."

For youths in the midst of puberty, discovering that they are no longer children but not yet adults, the transition from the safe environment of an elementary school to the unfamiliar confines of junior high can be difficult.

"It's a real bad time. They are encountering more things than they ever encountered before. They may be thrown into some sort of violence and be robbed or shaken down for the first time," said Beverly Schwartz of New York, a former teacher who now coordinates a national youth anti-smoking project.

Like their elders, the young teens may turn to

cigarettes as a crutch, "trying to look cool and sophisticated and older," she said.

The National Institute on Education, which conducted the \$2.4 million study on school violence, found that the rate of violent incidents declined steadily from the seventh through the 12th grades. It said some evidence suggests that segregating students from the most volatile age group into junior high schools contributes to the problems.

David Boesel, author of the study, said the risks were higher for seventh and ninth graders in junior high schools than for those in the same grades in schools that combine grades seven through 12.