



Healthy Youth!

Health Topics

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CDC addresses six critical types of adolescent health behavior that research shows contribute to the leading causes of death and disability among adults and youth. Other important issues that affect children and adolescents are also addressed.

Six Critical Health Behaviors

1. [Alcohol & Drug Use](#)

Alcohol abuse is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States (4% of the total deaths in 2000), and is a factor in approximately 41% of all deaths from motor vehicle crashes.

2. [Injury & Violence \(including suicide\)](#)

Injury and violence is the leading cause of death among youth aged 10-24 years: motor vehicle crashes (37% of all deaths), all other unintentional injuries (16%), homicide (18%), and suicide (13%).

3. [Tobacco Use](#)

Every day about 4,000 American youth aged 12–17 years try their first cigarette. It is estimated that smoking causes 435,000 deaths each year in the United States.

4. [Nutrition](#)

Almost 80% of young people do not eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. Nearly 9 million youth in the United States aged 6–19 years are overweight.

5. [Physical Activity](#)

Participation in physical activity declines as children get older. Overall, in 2005, 36% of 9-12 graders had participated in at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity. Nearly 37% of 9th graders, but only 33% of 12th graders, participated in 60 minutes of physical activity on a regular basis.

6. [Sexual Risk Behaviors](#)

Each year, there are approximately 19 million new STD infections in the United States, and almost half of them are among youth aged 15 to 24. Thirty-four percent of young women become pregnant at least once before they reach the age of 20.

These behaviors usually are established during childhood, persist into adulthood, are inter-related, and are preventable. In addition to causing serious health problems, these behaviors also contribute to the educational and social problems that confront the nation, including failure to complete

high school, unemployment, and crime.

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Other Important Health Topics

[Asthma](#)

On average, in a classroom of 30 children, about three are likely to have asthma. Five million school-aged children and youth are reported to currently have asthma, and asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.

[Crisis Preparedness & Response](#)

Preparation is the responsibility of every school, community, and state. Should an event or threat occur or be suspected, every staff member should know how to respond based on protocols or community-based plans established in advance in collaboration with public health and first responder agencies.

[Food Safety](#)

Educating students, families, and school staff on simple but effective food safety measures can help prevent the approximately 76 million cases of foodborne illness that are reported in the United States annually, resulting in an average of 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths. Food safety is especially important in schools, because each day more than 27 million children get their lunch through the National School Lunch Program. Furthermore, educating students in school about food safety can help them build good food safety habits that last a lifetime.

[Mental Health](#)

Mental health is an under-recognized serious health problem. An estimated 21% of young people in the United States between the ages 9 and 17 have diagnosable emotional or behavioral health disorders, but less than a third get help for these problems.

[Childhood Overweight](#)

The prevalence of overweight among children ages 6 to 11 has more than doubled in the past 20 years, going from 7% in 1980 to 19% in 2004. Several chronic disease risk factors are related to childhood overweight and obesity, including high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Additionally, overweight young people have a great likelihood of becoming overweight adults and developing diseases associated with adulthood, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

[Skin Cancer](#)

The most common form of cancer in the United States is skin cancer. Skin cancer is a preventable disease, as exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays appears to be the most important environmental factor. Schools are in a good position to encourage children to develop sun protection habits.

Related Resources

[Adolescent Health](#). During the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents establish patterns of behavior and make lifestyle choices that affect both their current and future health.

[Addressing Health Disparities](#). In the United States different racial and ethnic populations, as well as sexual minority populations, suffer disproportionately from preventable diseases and conditions, many of which result from health-related behaviors that are established during childhood and adolescence.

[Registries of Effective Programs](#) lists federally-sponsored registries that include programs with evidence of effectiveness in reducing youth risk behaviors.

[Steps to a HealthierUS](#) is an initiative from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that advances the goal of helping Americans live longer, better, and healthier lives. The Steps Cooperative Agreement Program funds [40 communities nationwide](#) to implement school and other community-based programs that address obesity, diabetes, and asthma, as well as their related risk behaviors: physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.

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