

HELP ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH TO MAINTAIN THEIR HEALTH AND REALIZE THEIR DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL



Adolescents: 10–19 years old | Youth: 15–24 years old
WHO definition

“Every young person to have the knowledge and power to make informed choices about their bodies and lives, and to participate in transforming their world”

“My body, My life, My world!”, UNFPA global strategy for adolescents and youth, 2020

The ICPD 1994 Programme of action commits the country to the “... promotion to the fullest extent of the health, wellbeing and potential of all adolescents and youth; meeting the special needs of adolescents and youth, especially young women and girls for social, family and community support, employment opportunities, participation in political processes and access to education, health, counseling and high-quality reproductive health services; keeping adolescents and youth, in particular young women and girls in school, to help prevent early marriage and high-risk childbearing and to reduce associated mortality and morbidity...”.

In accordance with the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child, adolescents have:

The right to life and healthy development (Article 6)

The right to have their opinions heard (Article 12)

The right to express their views and the right to autonomy (Articles 12 and 14)

The right to protection of their best interests (Article 3)

The right to protection from violence (Article 19)

The right to protection from discrimination (Article 2)

Facts about Adolescents and Youth:

The health of adolescents and youth impacts not just the health of a nation but also its socioeconomic development.



Adolescents and youth are the current and future drivers of any country's development. Healthy and competent adolescents will become healthy and competent adults who can contribute to the economic productivity of their country. Without investing in the health and development of adolescents, the vicious cycle of ill-health and socioeconomic deprivation will not be broken.

Investment in the health of adolescents and youth brings a triple dividend of benefits:

**! Healthy adolescents today
● Healthy adults tomorrow
● Healthy next generation**

Investment in adolescent health reduces current and future health care costs and enhances a country's capital of the society. Moreover, adolescents can have an influence not only on their own health but also on the health of their families and loved ones. **Adolescents are powerful agents for social change, and not simply beneficiaries of social programs.**

Adolescence is a period of biological and psychosocial development. This time in a person's life is particularly important to their identity formation*.

This is a period of rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and sexual development that determines all aspects of human life.

In adolescents, the brain components that seek pleasure and reward outgrow those responsible for planning and controlling impulsive behavior and emotions. Yet the adolescent brain also has an extraordinary ability to change and adapt. The human brain itself is not fully developed until around the age of 25.

The onset of puberty



Biological changes

The development of advanced cognitive abilities (awareness, understanding, comprehension)



Cognitive changes

Self-perception, intimacy and relationships with surrounding adults and peers



Emotional changes

Transition to new roles in society



Social changes

Today's adolescents mature earlier biologically than they do socially.

Due to changes in the education system, young people today tend to spend more time studying and perusing the internet and tend to enter the work place and have their own families later. Nevertheless, children also develop physically faster and hit puberty earlier than in previous generations. This results in a gap between young people's biological maturity and their transition into the social status of adults, their acquisition of social skills such as responsibility and autonomy, and their ability to make their own decisions.

* Global accelerated action for the health of adolescents (AA-HA!): Guidance to support country implementation (WHO, 2018)

Balancing protection and autonomy in the modern world

Today's adolescents have more opportunities to access healthcare by themselves, but the healthcare system is not always ready to meet their needs. Young people are often not involved in decisions that affect their lives and their rights could be overlooked.

Yet due to their age, adolescents and young people suffer significantly from some aspects of globalization. They are most vulnerable to the negative influence of pornography, online bullying, and some electronic games.

Adolescents are like powerful cars without experienced drivers.

The adolescent's inclination to experiment, seek, and risk is not pathology but rather norm, and the result of age-related brain developments. This age is prone to risky behaviors, including sexual ones, which means that adolescents need to be paid special attention and provided with a favorable environment that supports their health. Preventive work should be aimed at informing and educating young people, as well as helping them to develop safe behaviors and necessary life skills. We must mitigate the risks associated with adolescent behaviors with up-to-date protective measures.

Risk and protective factors affecting adolescents*

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS AFFECTING ADOLESCENTS	EARLY SEXUAL DEBUT	USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES	DEPRESSION
Good relationships with parents	●	●	●
Family conflicts		▲	▲
Positive school environment	●	●	●
Negative example of friends	▲	▲	●
Good adult relationships outside the family			●
Spiritual convictions	●	●	●
Other types of risky behavior	▲		

● protective factor ▲ risk

* World Health Organization 2006, 2017; EuTEACH, 2017

Youth health centers provide youth-friendly services

The government's concern for the health of adolescents and youth implies the provision of affordable, high-quality, and free medical care, in addition to effective preventive action. These services should be tailored to the needs and expectations of young people and their expectations of such assistance. **Youth health centers (YHC)** in Kazakhstan were set up with this in mind, and employ trained multidisciplinary teams of specialists. The centers provide medical, psychological, and social services to adolescents and youth under 24 years of age, including services relating to the protection of reproductive and mental health and social support for adolescents in difficult life situations, including those victims of sexual violence.



An ideal center for me:

provides a range of services

does not look like a hospital

works for both boys and girls

is open until the evening

has friendly and qualified staff

has a helpline

non-judgemental service

Youth-friendly services should be consistent with the following four principles:



1 Accessibility

The procedure to receive medical help should be very simple.

Medical service should be affordable or provided free of charge to young people.

Young people should get a range of different medical services in one place without having to go elsewhere.

In addition to medical assistance young people should get counseling—individually or in a group—that promotes a safe behavior and the necessary life skills while addressing disease prevention, puberty, and related conditions that concern adolescents.

Adolescents in difficult life situations and victims of violence, including sexual violence, should be given psychological and social assistance.

2 Voluntariness

Young people are provided with an environment that encourages them to make free and informed choices to turn to youth health centers, participate in their activities, and voluntarily choose their services.

Young people should independently and of their own accord consult a doctor not only in case of an illness but also as a preventive measure, voluntarily choose services, and follow the recommendations of the center's staff.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUTH HEALTH CENTERS AND COMMON OUTPATIENT CLINICS?

Outpatient clinic

Care for sick people

Treatment

Care is limited to medical assistance

Common problem

Directive model: a specialist is the one who makes decisions

Youth health centers

Care for both healthy and sick people

Problem management, prevention, and treatment

Several types of assistance (medical, psychological, social, legal)

Puberty related issues are not reported to a regular outpatient clinics

Cooperative model: the patient takes part in making decisions

3 Friendliness

Staff working in a youth health center should be as friendly to young people as possible

Specialists and other employees should not judge the lifestyle or characteristics of adolescents and young people but rather show respect and tolerance and support them in expressing their opinions.

The staff of a youth health center maintains confidentiality.

Youth health centers have unified and standardized approaches to working with patients, starting from the reception desk as the first point of contact.

4 Trust

The opinions of young people about the quality and range of services provided by a youth health center are compiled and taken into account.

Adolescent volunteers take part in the center's design.

The staff accepts young people as they are, according to what young patients expect of them.

Young people are free to make decisions that concern their own lives.

The center provides youth with the information and services they need.

Young people feel confident and comfortable when contacting the center.

Healthy generation = healthy nation

The government has every opportunity to create a “favorable environment” that should:

Empower adolescents, youth, and individuals, especially girls; develop their assets; and create a safe space for them.

Help young people build healthy relationships with parents and peers, develop good communication skills and leadership, and enhance peer-to-peer movements.

Engage actively with communities, like through the responsible fatherhood movement or the movement to change harmful gender stereotypes.

Transform society through the development of laws that protect the rights of adolescents and young people.

Creating a favorable environment for the younger generation entails government care for its citizens, who will in turn ensure the development and prosperity of their nation. It's a two-way street.

