

# Why is adolescent health so important?

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*Joan-Carles Suris, MD, MPH, PhD*  
University of Lausanne, Switzerland

## Reason # 1

# They are not as healthy as adults think

It is largely true that teenagers and young adults are biologically healthy, but young people are among the most vulnerable in terms of the diseases of society – poverty, exploitation, ignorance and risky behaviour.

*WHO, World Health Report 1995*

## **In Europe, out of every 100 adolescents aged 15:**

- 27 girls and 16 boys rate their health as fair or poor
- 62 have ever smoked and 17 smoke daily
- 31 girls and 40 boys have been drunk two or more times
- 19 girls and 26 boys have ever tried cannabis
- 8 are regular cannabis users and 3 heavy users
- 42 girls and 20 boys are dissatisfied with their body image
- 49 girls and 26 boys do not have breakfast every day
- 23 girls and 7 boys are engaged in weight control behaviour
- 9 girls and 15 boys are overweight

*Source: HBSC 2002*

## In Europe

- Almost 25% of all 18 year olds in the European Union are not in the education system.
- The EU-25 youth unemployment rate was 18.5 % in 2004, twice as high as the total unemployment rate.
- 30 to 50% have a job mismatch after leaving school.
- 20 to 80% have a precarious employment after leaving school. Ten years later, 5 to 60% are still in that situation.

Source: Eurostat

## Rank cause of death among people aged 15-24 around the world, 2002

	<u>15-19 years</u>	<u>20-24 years</u>
1	Road traffic injuries	HIV/AIDS
2	Self-inflicted injuries	Road traffic injuries
3	Maternal conditions	Self-inflicted injuries
4	Lower resp infect.	Maternal conditions
5	Interpersonal violence	Interpersonal violence
6	Drowning	Tuberculosis
7	Tuberculosis	Lower resp infect.
8	Fire burns	Fire burns
9	HIV/AIDS	War
10	Leukaemia	Drowning

Source: WHO

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Source: WHO

## Reason # 2 Adolescents are a special population

## What is special about young people

- They undergo huge physical changes
- They develop autonomy
- We need to balance their need for protection and independence
- They need information and skills because they are still developing
- They need a safe and supportive environment because they live in an adult world
- They need health and counseling services because they need a safety net
- They need opportunities to participate

# Reason # 3 Adolescence is a crucial period of life

## Adolescence: a gateway to the promotion of health

- Many of the behavioral patterns acquired during adolescence (such as gender relations, sexual conduct, the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, eating habits and dealing with conflict and risk) will last a lifetime.
- Adolescence provides opportunities to prevent the onset of health-damaging behaviors and their future repercussions.

*Source: WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF: Action for Adolescent Health*

**Health in childhood  
determines health  
throughout life  
and into  
the next generation.**

*Source: WHO Europe: The European health report 2005*

# Reason # 4

## Health services are often not adapted to their needs

### Convention on the Rights of the Child

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly  
resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989

entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49

#### Article 24

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

# Characteristics of adolescent friendly health services

- **accessible**
- **equitable**
- **acceptable**
- **appropriate,**
- **comprehensive**
- **effective**
- **efficient**

*Source: WHO: Adolescent Friendly Health Services — An Agenda for Change, 2002*

# Youth Friendly Health Services

- They are in the right place at the right time and if necessary free.
- The services given are in the right style to be acceptable to young people.
- They are effective because they are delivered by trained and motivated health care providers who are technically competent, and who know how to communicate with young people without being patronizing or judgmental.
- Involving adolescents in designing, delivering and monitoring services improves relevance, acceptability and effectiveness.



# Who is responsible for adolescent health?

*The Lancet, June 19, 2004*

First and foremost, young people themselves. Without their participation in identifying problems and devising strategies nothing can be achieved.

What society -schools, policy-makers and health professionals in particular- has to provide is non-judgmental information and education and easy access to services geared for adolescents specifically.

Adolescents will then have a real choice for healthy living.

# Reason # 5 They are the future

**Young people deserve sound  
and effective interventions**

**We need to work not only for  
but with young people**