



# WORKING FOR A BRIGHTER, HEALTHIER FUTURE

How WHO improves health  
and promotes well-being for  
the world's adolescents



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# Foreword

**The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic go far beyond the suffering and death caused by the disease itself. It has disrupted education, mental well-being and livelihoods, compounded existing inequalities and undermined past gains. For adolescents, these insults to health and well-being can have lifelong consequences.**

It has long been assumed that adolescents are healthy. Most are, but many adolescents face health challenges that have been historically unacknowledged and which the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed. Data show that the considerable gains from investments in maternal and child health programmes are not sustained in adolescence: the reduction in child mortality is not mirrored by a similar reduction in adolescent deaths. Of the world's 1.2 billion adolescents, many have missed out on high-quality, responsive health services that take account of their specific needs. Over 2000 adolescents die every day, mainly from preventable causes. And yet, at the same time, improvements to adolescents' health and well-being far outweigh their costs, they last a lifetime, and they are passed on to future generations.

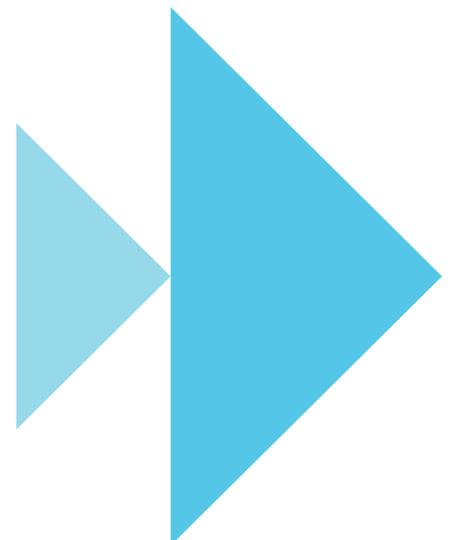
This is why this first WHO report on adolescent health is so important. This report illustrates WHO's work across the range of issues in adolescent health and shows how WHO has increased its portfolio of research, set norms and standards, encouraged country support and advocacy and extended the scope of its work at regional and country levels. We have created an interdepartmental working group to coordinate the work, in order to better address the multifaceted needs of the global adolescent population.

Central to WHO's work in adolescent health is engaging with adolescents themselves. We created the WHO Youth Council to provide a platform for young people to give advice on health and development issues directly to our leadership. This report provides many examples of WHO engagement with young people in all aspects of its work.

While much has been achieved in raising the profile of adolescent health, more work needs to be done to improve advocacy, coordination and implementation of programmes. WHO is working to collect and analyse data by age and gender; support the development of adolescent-responsive national strategies and plans; and help shape high-level policies to address the environmental, economic and other social determinants of adolescent health.

We must work together to improve adolescent health today, so that the health of future generations will be better tomorrow.

**Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**  
WHO Director-General



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# Abbreviations and acronyms

AA-HA!	Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents
COVID-19	coronavirus disease-2019
CSE	comprehensive sexuality education
HPV	human papillomavirus
mhGAP	Mental Health Gap Action Programme
NCD	noncommunicable disease
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRH	sexual and reproductive health
TB	tuberculosis
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization

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