

Child & Adolescent Health

Overview

Child and adolescent health covers the period from birth through adolescence (approximately ages 0-19). According to the World Health Organization, adolescence (10-19 yrs) is a formative life stage where physical, cognitive, social and emotional development happen rapidly.

Despite improvements in survival, many children and adolescents still face preventable risks (malnutrition, infectious disease, injuries, mental health challenges, early pregnancy, substance use). Investment in this age group yields large long-term returns in health and productivity.

Causes / Risk Factors

Key risk factors for poor health in this age group include:

- Undernutrition or obesity, both of which affect growth and lifelong health (For adolescents 10-19, over 1 in 6 were overweight globally in 2016)
- Risk behaviours: tobacco, alcohol, drugs, unsafe sex, violence, accidents
- Poor access to education, sanitation, immunisation, mental health services
- Social determinants: poverty, displacement, conflict, marginalized communities

Symptoms / Indicators

Signs that a child/adolescent may need health attention include:

- Growth delay, frequent illness, low energy (possible malnutrition)
- Loss of interest in school, mood changes, withdrawal (possible mental health issues)
- Frequent injuries, risk-taking behaviours (indicative of poor supervision/education)
- Early sexual activity or pregnancy, or signs of STI, indicating reproductive health risk

Prevention / Lifestyle

Preventive interventions include:

- Ensuring full immunisation according to schedule; nutritious diet; regular physical activity; adequate sleep

- Education on healthy lifestyles, sexual and reproductive health, substance use prevention
- Safe school and community environments, injury prevention (helmets, seat-belts), and mental health promotion
- Parental and community support, ensuring access to primary care and adolescent-friendly services

Screening / Diagnosis

Screening and diagnostic practices may include:

- Growth monitoring (height/weight/age) in early childhood
- Developmental assessment, school performance, emotional/behavioural screening
- Adolescent screening for substance use, sexual health risks, mental health
- Regular pediatric check-ups, immunisation status reviews, dental and vision screening

Management / Public Health Perspective

Public health efforts emphasize:

- Integrated programmes: the WHO's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030) prioritises this age-group
- School health programmes, adolescent-friendly clinics, youth-specific services
- Monitoring of indicators like adolescent overweight/obesity, tobacco and substance use, early pregnancy
- Collaboration across sectors: education, health, social welfare and community organisations to address broad determinants

Summary Points

- Childhood and adolescence are critical windows for lifelong health
- Preventive care, nutrition, immunisation and safe environments make a major difference
- Multi-sectoral public health programming is essential for youth health

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