

Key facts

The Western Pacific Region is home to an estimated **611 million children and adolescents**, and a large majority of these children spend a third of their time in school.

Despite advances in improving the health of children and adolescents in recent decades, **substantial health challenges persist**, including injuries, violence, substance abuse, noncommunicable diseases, mental health conditions and unhealthy diets.

Investing in healthy schools provides an opportunity for children and young people to acquire the knowledge and skills on healthy living they need to build a foundation for a healthy future.

The Western Pacific Region is home to **611 million children and adolescents aged 0–19 years**, and a large majority of these **children spend a third of their time each year in school**. Ensuring good health for current generations of children and young people – and supporting them to adopt the healthy habits that are the foundation of long, healthy lives – requires a special focus on health in schools.

Despite advances in improving the health of children and adolescents in the Region in recent decades, **substantial health challenges and risks persist**, including injuries, violence, substance abuse, mental health conditions and unsafe environments. In the Region, there was a **twentyfold increase in overweight and obesity** among children and adolescents from 1975 to 2016. At the same time, approximately **12 million children were stunted**. The current prevalence of heavy episodic alcohol consumption in the Region among adolescents aged 15–19 years is 13.6%, and **nearly 6 million children aged 13–15 years are using tobacco products**. Prolonged school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted students' learning as well as their physical and mental health.

All of these issues pose challenges for the health of children today, but of even greater concern is their impact on the health and well-being of this generation in the years and decades to come. **Today's data on the prevalence of overweight and obesity, tobacco use, insufficient physical activity, alcohol consumption and other threats to child and adolescent health provide a preview of the future**, unless we act to change the future now.

We can do this by investing in schools as 'incubators' for health, which help support children in their learning and education, and which also influence and inspire children and adolescents to be healthier adults and achieve their highest capability and potential.

WHO response

With the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases and the ongoing presence of communicable diseases in the Region, all Member States are encouraged to take action now by investing in healthy schools.

To promote the positive development and health of children and adolescents, WHO has developed the draft **Regional Framework on Nurturing Resilient and Healthy Future Generations in the Western Pacific** in close collaboration with Member States, stakeholders, partners and experts. The Regional Framework supports countries and areas in the Region to achieve three goals:

1. entrench healthy behaviours that stick
2. schools influencing the community through utilizing a "spill-over" effect
3. invest in schools today to build a healthier tomorrow.

To achieve these goals, the Framework details suggested actions for schools, governments and WHO to take, which can be adapted to country-specific contexts. In line with this Framework, WHO will provide technical support to Member States to **develop, update and implement national guidelines, strategies and tools**.

Further, WHO will compile data, research and case studies relevant to this Framework and will work with Member States to **facilitate cross-country sharing of replicable local solutions and best practices**.

