

# Promoting Health for Children and Adolescents

CDC works to help children and adolescents develop healthy habits.

Establishing healthy behaviors to prevent chronic disease is easier and more effective during childhood and adolescence than trying to change unhealthy behaviors during adulthood. CDC's [National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](#) works with parents, early care and education (ECE) facilities, schools, health systems, and communities to keep children healthy by:

- Reducing obesity risk for children in ECE facilities.
- Improving healthy food options and nutrition education in school.
- Improving physical education and physical activity opportunities in school.
- Preventing use of all tobacco products.
- Helping children and adolescents manage their chronic health conditions in school.
- Promoting the use of dental sealants to prevent cavities.
- Promoting adequate sleep.

## Reducing Obesity Risk in ECE Facilities

Childhood obesity is a serious national problem. In the United States, the rate of obesity is 13.9% among children aged 2 to 5. Children's health behaviors are shaped by influences in multiple settings, including home, ECE facilities, schools, and communities.

ECE settings—which include day care, preschool, pre-K facilities, and care provided in homes—are ideal places to encourage good nutrition and physical activity for early obesity prevention. CDC's [Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity](#) funds grantees who work to improve the quality of ECE programs across state and local levels—for example, through licensing, technical assistance networks, and training requirements for providers.

## In the United States:



**20.6% OF ADOLESCENTS**  
aged 12 to 19 have obesity.



**1 IN 4 STUDENTS**  
has a chronic condition.



**31.2% OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**  
use at least one tobacco product.





CDC's [Childhood Obesity Research Demonstration \(CORD\) Projects](#) fund grantees to learn how to best manage childhood obesity among low-income children and their families. Grantees are looking at the role that health care providers can play in screening for obesity and referring patients to healthy lifestyle programs in the community. Project findings help guide CDC's childhood obesity efforts across the nation.

## Improving Healthy Food Options in School

The percentage of obesity is 18.4% among children aged 6 to 11 and rises to 20.6% for adolescents aged 12 to 19. Children who have obesity are at higher risk of obesity as adults. School is an ideal setting for children to learn and practice healthy eating. Most US children attend school for at least 6 hours a day and consume as much as half of their daily calories at school. [CDC Healthy Schools](#) in the Division of Population Health recommends that schools create an environment that helps students make healthy choices about foods and beverages. For example, schools can:

- Promote access to and participation in school breakfast and lunch.
- Ensure that all foods and beverages sold or served outside of school meal programs are nutritious and appealing.
- Offer healthy foods and beverages at school celebrations and events and only nonfood items as rewards.
- Provide more access to drinking water.
- Promote healthy foods and beverages—for example, by pricing them lower than less healthy items.
- Include nutrition education in health education, throughout the school day, and in after-school programs—for example, through school gardens and farm-to-school activities.

CDC funds state departments of education to increase the number of students who consume nutritious foods and beverages.

## Improving Physical Education and Physical Activity Opportunities in School

About one-quarter of adolescents get the recommended 60 minutes a day of physical activity. CDC Healthy Schools recommends that schools use all available opportunities for students to get physical activity and learn how to be physically active for a lifetime. Schools are encouraged to:

- Offer physical education to increase students' knowledge, skills, and confidence to be physically active and improve their health and academic outcomes, such as increased physical activity, improved grades and standardized test scores, and better classroom behavior.



- Offer recess at all grade levels to encourage students to be physically active and engaged with their peers in activities of their choice.
- Integrate physical activity into classroom instruction.
- Promote before- and after-school opportunities to be physically active, through walking or biking programs, physical activity clubs, intramural programs, and competitive sports.

CDC funds state departments of education to increase the number of students who participate in daily physical education and physical activity.



## Preventing Youth Use of Tobacco Products

Nearly 9 in 10 adult cigarette smokers in the United States first tried a cigarette before age 18. Every day, about 1,600 young people under 18 try their first cigarette, and nearly 200 become daily cigarette smokers. About 12 of every 100 middle school students and about 31 of every 100 high school students report current use of some type of tobacco product.

Any tobacco use among young people—whether burned, electronic, or smokeless—is unsafe because nicotine is addictive and can harm the developing brain. Nicotine exposure during adolescence affects learning, memory, and attention and primes the brain for addiction.

CDC’s [Office on Smoking and Health](#) is at the forefront of the nation’s efforts to reduce deaths and prevent chronic diseases that result from tobacco use. CDC’s activities include:

- Monitoring youth tobacco use through the National Youth Tobacco Survey, which focuses on use, beliefs, and knowledge about tobacco among middle and high school students.
- Funding 50 states and the District of Columbia, 8 territories, 27 tribes, 8 national networks, and several other partners to support their youth tobacco prevention initiatives and other work to reduce tobacco-related disease and death.
- Helping parents, educators, health care providers, and other youth influencers understand and talk to young people about the risks of tobacco products by developing easy-to-understand materials that make sense of the best available science.



## Helping Students Manage Chronic Conditions

As many as 1 in 4 US students has a chronic health condition such as asthma, diabetes, or epilepsy. Managing students’ chronic health conditions can be a challenge for school personnel. A coordinated effort that involves family members, community groups, social service agencies, and medical providers working with teachers, school nurses, and staff is crucial.





The health care needs of children with chronic health conditions can be complex and continuous and include both daily management and potential emergencies. Ensuring that students have the [health services](#) they need to manage their chronic conditions while at school is important in helping them stay healthy and ready to learn.

CDC funds state education agencies to improve the delivery of health services in schools and increase the number of students who can effectively manage their chronic health conditions.

## Promoting the Use of Dental Sealants

Dental sealants are protective coatings applied to the chewing surfaces of the back teeth, where most cavities start. Although use of sealants has increased, this effective intervention remains underused. Less than half of children aged 6 to 11 have dental sealants. The use of dental sealants varies among racial and ethnic groups, as does the prevalence of treated and untreated cavities. In addition, children from lower-income families are twice as likely to have untreated cavities as those from higher-income families, but they are less likely to have dental sealants.

School sealant programs provide dental sealants at no charge to children who are less likely to receive private dental care. These programs provide sealants to students during the school day using mobile dental equipment. Providing these services at school is especially effective at reaching children at risk of developing cavities.

Programs funded by CDC's [Division of Oral Health](#) focus on schools that serve children at high risk of cavities. CDC provides guidance to state and community programs to help them plan, set up, and evaluate school sealant programs and to complement services provided by private dentists. An online data collection tool called [SEALS](#) allows programs to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of their efforts.

## Promoting Better Sleep

Sleep is increasingly recognized as a component of good health. Getting enough sleep can help children prevent obesity, type 2 diabetes, attention and behavior problems, poor mental health, and injuries. Children aged 6 to 12 need 9 to 12 hours of sleep a night. Teens aged 13 to 18 need 8 to 10 hours of sleep a night.

CDC works to increase parents' awareness about their children's need for good sleep and how they can help their children get enough—for example, by setting the same bed and wake-up times each day, including on the weekends, and by modeling good sleep behaviors.