

Healthy Schools

How CDC Helps Students Get a Healthy Start

Unhealthy behaviors and chronic diseases are increasingly common in children and adolescents in the United States. About 1 in 4 adolescents has a chronic health condition, such as asthma, diabetes, or obesity. The percentage of children aged 6 to 11 who have obesity increased from 7% in 1976–1980 to 18% in 2015–2016. The percentage of adolescents aged 12 to 19 with obesity increased from 5% to 21% during the same period.

Children with unhealthy behaviors or chronic conditions may miss more school, which reduces their opportunities and time for learning. They may face lower academic achievement, increased disability, fewer job opportunities, and limited community interactions as they enter adulthood.

Establishing healthy behaviors during childhood is easier and more effective than trying to change unhealthy behaviors during adulthood. Schools play a critical role in helping children develop lifelong healthy habits. Each day, 133,000 schools in the United States provide a setting for 57 million students to learn about health and healthy behaviors.

Working With Schools to Make Students Healthier

With \$15.4 million in FY 2019 funding, [CDC Healthy Schools](#) works with states, school systems, communities, and national partners to prevent chronic diseases and promote the health and well-being of children and adolescents in schools. CDC's framework for addressing health in schools is the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) (WSCC) model. The WSCC model is student-centered and emphasizes the role of the community in supporting schools and the importance of evidence-based policies and practices.

Partnering with key leaders from the health and education fields, CDC Healthy Schools promotes:

- Healthier [nutrition](#) options and education.
- Comprehensive [physical education and physical activity](#) programs.
- Improved school policies and better staff training to help students manage [chronic conditions](#).

In the United States:



1 IN 4 ADOLESCENTS
has a chronic health condition.



18% OF CHILDREN
had obesity in 2015–2016.



57 MILLION
students could be reached
with health messages.





- [Health education](#) that instills lifelong healthy habits and health literacy.
- Practices that improve [school health services](#) and links to clinical and community resources.

Collecting Data

CDC uses three [surveillance systems](#) to monitor health behaviors, practices, and policies in schools: the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, the School Health Policies and Practices Study, and the School Health Profiles. Data collected through these systems are used to identify effective strategies, develop and evaluate programs, and develop guidelines and tools to improve school health policies, programs, and curricula.

For example, data from the 2015 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey show that students with higher grades are more likely to engage in healthy dietary behaviors—such as eating vegetables one or more times a day or drinking milk instead of soft drinks—compared to students with lower grades. School officials and other decision makers can use this information to promote policies and practices that support healthy eating in schools.

Funding Schools and Partners

CDC funds [state education agencies](#) to help them prevent obesity and manage chronic health conditions that are common among students, including asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, food allergies, and poor oral health. For example, North Carolina used CDC funds to develop a healthy eating program for several of its school districts. As a result, nearly 8,000 students now have access to drinking water throughout the school day. They are also learning about the nutritional value of foods served in school cafeterias from electronic menu boards.

CDC also funds [nongovernmental organizations](#) to support the work of state grantees in priority areas.

Training School Staff

CDC provides free [resources and training](#) that school administrators and staff can use to help ensure that students are healthy and ready to learn. Many of these resources are self-directed e-learning modules that include resource links, videos, and continuing education opportunities. Staff in state departments of education, state departments of health, school districts, school communities, and national organizations can also use these resources to help schools improve the knowledge and skills of their staff.

Promoting Parent Involvement

CDC provides information and resources to help [parents](#) become involved in their child's school, advocate for their child, and help shape a healthy school environment. Parents can learn what schools are doing to keep children healthy and safe, as well as how they can take action and track progress. These resources can also help schools and school groups—such as parent-teacher associations, parent-teacher organizations, and school wellness committees—work with parents to get them involved.