

spectra

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Youth

2 A national health policy for the young

Groundwork that is important for adult health can already be laid in childhood and adolescence. This makes prevention measures aimed at young people particularly worthwhile. The earlier prevention begins, the more effective it becomes. In addition, adolescents must be able to move forward through difficult development phases without harming their health or jeopardising their social integration. Against the backdrop of these convictions, the Federal Office of Public Health is currently drawing up a strategy for a coherent youth health policy.

3 Include more physical activity in the school routine

A healthy mind in a healthy body: physical activity is not just healthy, it is also good for mental performance, improving for instance concentration and also the general atmosphere in schools. To introduce more physical activity into the school routine, the Federal Office for Sport has launched the «schule.bewegt» project, which provides easy-to-use teaching material to encourage classes of all age groups to engage in 20 minutes of physical activity each day. More than 2400 classes have already registered for this uncomplicated, free-of-charge project.

4 Targeting binge drinking in the young

The figures speak for themselves: every year, alcohol consumption costs Switzerland 2100 fatalities and 30000 lost years of life. The drinking habits of many young people are particularly appalling: each day, five young people are admitted to Swiss A & E units for alcohol-related reasons. As a pastime, binge drinking is as popular as it is absurd. The final round of «Handle with care!», the Swiss alcohol control programme initiated in 1999, has just reminded young people that their goal should be «Heads up, not bottoms up».



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Lots of ideas for physical activity as part of the school routine

Encouraging physical activity. The many positive effects of physical activity include improved mental performance. It should therefore be an integral part of the school routine. The *schule.bewegt* programme for promoting physical activity gives children a daily «exercise» lesson without taking up too much time.

Numerous studies confirm the positive effect of physical activity on the ability of students to concentrate and on the atmosphere in schools. So the conclusion is: more daily physical activity in schools. The *schule.bewegt* (Schools on the move)

project of the Federal Office for Sport (BASPO) is intended as a service for teachers at all school levels and provides each registered class with easy-to-use school material free of charge. In return, the class undertakes to engage in at least twenty minutes of physical activity every day. This can be on the way to school, during lessons, in breaks or as homework. In the present school year, 2 400 classes have already registered with *schule.bewegt*, and more are doing so every day.

Practical, free, flexible and beneficial

The *schule.bewegt* project is an uncomplicated and effective means of integrating daily physical activity into the school routine. Teachers receive a set of cards featuring ideas for physical activities that can be performed without any preparation. Each class decides for itself how it wants to organise its daily physical activity, choosing from a range of five activity modules plus a supplementary module.

All pupils in the classes registered receive the activity material free of charge. The teachers decide when they will begin and end the *schule.bewegt* activities.

There is only one condition: the class must participate for at least three months. Feedback from teachers shows that the daily sequences of physical activity improve the atmosphere in the class, the exercises are easy to perform and they are also fun.

This is how *schule.bewegt* works

Teachers register their classes with *schule.bewegt* for at least one module. A *schule.bewegt* brochure, card sets and practical material are then mailed to them. On completion of the programme, the classes can rate the *schule.bewegt* project. All classes completing the questionnaire take part in the draw for the annual *schule.bewegt* sport day in Mägglingen. In addition, about 30 participating schools receive a visit from a «patron» of *schule.bewegt* – all of whom are well known sportsmen and sportswomen – in the course of the school year.

For registration and further information, visit www.schulebewegt.ch.

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On course for a S

Youth health. The Federal Office of Public Health plays a major role in the field of youth health. The national coordination and development of a coherent «Youth Health» strategy is of cardinal importance. This strategy is currently being drawn up.

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) seeks to promote the health of everyone living in Switzerland. It wants to empower people to assume responsibility for their own health. In addition, it aims to implement health promotion, prevention, health protection, cure or palliation of diseases and accidents in such a way as to achieve the greatest possible health gain for everyone.

Best age for prevention

Among these activities, prevention measures aimed at young people are particularly worthwhile. Groundwork can be laid in childhood and adolescence that is important for adult health. Current research indicates that children and adolescents with a high level of risk factors are more likely to fall ill later in life. This causes considerable costs to the economy as well as a great deal of personal suffering. Prevention has been shown to be more effective the earlier it begins. Particular attention therefore needs to be paid to prevention, early diagnosis, early intervention, health education and skills, and health promotion in childhood and adolescence. Adolescents are subject to increased health risks: physical and cognitive development, relationships and sexuality, development of independence and identity,

The proportion of

Tobacco Monitoring 2001–2008.

The Tobacco Monitoring survey measures the smoking habits of people aged between 14 and 65 in Switzerland as well as other aspects of smoking. This article focuses on the findings from the last survey of smoking trends among young people aged between 14 and 19.

The percentage of smokers in the 14–19 age group in Switzerland fell from 29% in the 2001/2002 survey period to 24% in 2006/2007. The decline in smoking can be observed in all three main language regions. The proportions of males and females who smoke appear to be converging. In 2006/2007, 25% of males and 23% of females smoked. The percentage of smokers rises rapidly with age. While only 8% of 14–15 year olds smoked in 2006/2007, the figure was 26% for 16–17 year olds and 37% for 18–19 year olds. There was a slight fall in smoking in the 14–15 age group, while the proportion of smokers in the other age groups has stayed more or less the same for several years. 44% of

Credits

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Swiss policy on youth health

choice of school and occupation – all these changes can trigger both internal coping behaviour (e.g. depression, eating disorders, suicide) and external coping strategies (e.g. bullying, aggression, delinquency, accidents, substance abuse) that are harmful to health. In terms of prevention, youth is a period with a great deal of opportunities as well as a large number of problems. Because young people change their risk and coping behaviour relatively quickly, a lot of sensitivity and flexibility is required in prevention work. On the other hand, youth is a time of life in which people are generally very willing to learn – an important prerequisite for effective prevention and health promotion. These considerations suggest a number of goals for a policy on youth health that is to meet the needs of today:

- Children and adolescents should enjoy the best possible health.
- They should be able to move forward even through difficult phases in their development without any harm to health or jeopardising their social integration or further development.
- Any developmental problems arising should be identified at an early stage. Appropriate help for children, adolescents and their families should be guaranteed and made accessible to everyone.

The youth health project

In order to determine the need for additional action by the FOPH on youth health, various internal investigations were carried out as part of the process of conceptualising the youth-health mandate. There is a need for clarification

- and/or action in the following areas:
- Strategy development/definition: what is youth health? What coherent strategy on youth health does the FOPH pursue? How can a coherent definition be drawn up on the basis of a multifactorial viewpoint? How can parliament's demands be implemented?
 - Coordination/communication: are the various ongoing FOPH projects coordinated with one another? Are they in line with the strategy? How does coordination function within the FOPH and the Confederation? How does the FOPH communicate externally? How can a coherent definition and multifactorial viewpoint be institutionalised? How can the many partners work together more closely?
 - Knowledge transfer: how do FOPH staff, partner institutions and other federal offices throughout Switzerland receive the information they need? How can knowledge transfer and theory-to-practice transfer be fostered?
 - Documentation: are sufficient data available? Are the projects evaluated? Which possibly new risks should be included? How can the data be made available to interested parties? How can federal surveys be coordinated?
 - Innovation: in which areas of youth health is there still a need for action? Where can/should new projects be launched?

With input from external experts (Youth Health panel, the FOPH's Youth task

- force, other federal offices, associations, commissions, NGOs and young people), the findings of the internal analysis are currently being examined and, if necessary, supplemented in order to draw up specific options for the FOPH to act on. The results of the analysis should be available by spring 2009. Work on formulating specific action will begin in the second half of 2009. It is already clear that other questions will have to be considered in addition to the above:
- What role do pre-school children play in youth health policy?
 - In what ways can the goal of health-related equality of opportunity in relation to education, economic status, origin, federal structures, etc., be achieved?
 - How can health education for parents be improved?
 - What is to be done to ensure that people are reached by programmes in particular and by the healthcare system in general?

While work on the analysis is in progress, the many successful FOPH projects in the field of youth health will be continued. You will find an overview of a small selection of them in the following pages.

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At first hand

The majority of young people are in very good health. They smoke less and are less likely to use illicit drugs than in the 1980 and 1990s. The suicide rate among young people has fallen since 1980. Thanks to vaccination and the availability of good basic medical care, they are growing up healthier than just a few decades ago. They are involved, creative, adventurous and well integrated. However, 10 to 20% of young people exhibit risk behaviour that may result in health and integration problems. It is this group we have to focus on, taking care to use the right resources. In this endeavour, the Confederation, cantons, municipalities, NGOs and schools have to find the right balance

- between setting limits and allowing limits to be overstepped;
- between treating young people like children and encouraging personal responsibility;
- between stigmatisation and idealisation;
- between protecting young people and encouraging their development.

Fostering health skills, development and use of resources plays a key role in this process. Too much value should not be attached to some of the issues hyped up by the media – prevention projects need to be based on solid facts. All these issues have to be discussed – within the FOPH as elsewhere – before a coherent strategy can be drawn up on youth-health policy.

Our «youth» is both our personal past and our future, shaped by the generations to come. If planning of projects is to take actual needs into account, a better understanding of youth and better understanding between the generations are indispensable, particularly with regard to health policy. According to Kurt Tucholsky in 1931, «The different ages of man view one another as belonging to different races: the elderly have usually forgotten that they were once young or they forget that they are old, while the young never understand that they can grow old». If we can make sure we never lose sight of this perspective, we will already have taken a first step towards achieving a «healthy» policy on youth health. To this end, I therefore invite you to take a look at these following pages, which highlight some of the Federal Office of Public Health's ongoing activities in the field of youth health.



Roy Salveter
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«never smokers» has grown

young smokers have no intention of giving up the habit. Half of them believe it will be difficult for them to stop smoking

Strong influence of family and friends

The strong connection between young people's smoking habits and those of their families and friends was reconfirmed, as in 2001/2002 and 2004/2005. The proportion of young people who smoke every day is almost three times as high (26%) if both parents smoke, compared with only 10% if neither parent does so. Siblings have a similarly strong influence. The proportion of young people who smoke every day is three times as high if a sibling also smokes: 9% if no sibling smokes; 27% if a brother or a sister smokes. Smokers are more likely to have friends who smoke. A total of 83% of daily smokers estimate that at least half of their friends smoke. Among never smokers, only 28% report a comparably high estimate. Nevertheless, the proportion of smokers among respondents' friends seems to have fallen slightly: while 26%

of respondents in 2001/2002 claimed that their friends either did not smoke or smoked very little, the figure for the 2006/2007 period was 39%. The perceived difficulty of giving up smoking depends, among other factors, on whether it is hard to refuse offers of cigarettes and whether the tobacco smoke is inhaled or not. If many friends smoke, giving up the habit is also considered to be much harder than if only a few friends smoke. In all age groups, young people continue to overestimate the proportion of their peers who smoke: in 2007/2008, 24% of all young people admitted that they smoked. However, they put the proportion of smokers among their peers at over 49%.

Smokers have a poorer image

Non-smokers have a better image than smokers: smokers often attribute positive qualities to non-smokers and negative qualities above all to smokers. The three main reasons given for smoking are: «Smoking has become a habit» (67%), «I'm often under stress and smoking calms me down» (72%) and «I enjoy the taste» (64%). From the view-

point of non-smokers, the main reasons for not smoking are: «Smoking is unhealthy» (93%), «I don't want to become addicted» (84%) and «Smokers always smell bad» (80%). In addition, just over 74% do not smoke because «it's expensive».

Prevention is on course

The findings of this survey are in line with prevention efforts and indicate a positive trend with regard to prevalence. A further development in the field of prevention is the way that young people perceive the behaviour of smokers and smoking itself. However, social environment continues to play a crucial role in the decision whether to smoke or not to smoke.

Further information

The summary and the full report are available at www.tabakmonitoring.ch.

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«Handle with care!» – alcohol control campaign ends on a high note

Handle with care! «Heads up, not bottoms up» has been the motto of the Swiss alcohol control programme since 1999. In December 2008, the final round of the visually high-impact «Handle with care!» campaign was launched with a new set of subjects. Once again, the campaign targeted young people to show them the negative effects of excessive drinking.

Each day, five young people are admitted to Swiss accident & emergency units for alcohol-related reasons (usually alcohol poisoning). Alcohol – particularly the widespread binge drinking – can have serious effects on health, especially in adolescents. It increases the individual's willingness to use violence, is responsible for a large number of accidents and reduces quality of life for the population as a whole. Every year alcohol consumption causes 2 100 deaths and 30 000 lost years of life.

No campaign in 2009

In June last year, the Swiss Government approved the National Alcohol Control Programme 2008–2012 (NPA). The NPA aims to raise awareness among the public of the need to take personal responsibility and treat alcohol in a way that minimises risks. It also focuses particularly on the problem of alcohol consumption in adolescents and young



adults. It is driven by the vision that «people who drink alcohol do so without harming themselves or others.» Working with other federal offices and leading players in the field of Swiss alcohol policy, the Federal Office of Public Health had completed an implementation plan for the NPA by the end of 2008. In light of this, it was decided that there would be no national alcohol control campaign in 2009.

New subjects in December 2008

As there is to be no alcohol control campaign in 2009, the last wave of the famil-



iar «Handle with care!» campaign was launched in December 2008. Building on the existing concept, the campaign was brought to a close with three new subjects that covered the key issues of the NPA: violence and accidents due to the effects of alcohol. The main messages, roughly translated as «I'm not getting into a car driven by you!», «Just calm down, man!» or «I'm not DJ-ing for you in that state!», vividly communicate the negative effects that alcohol consumption can have. These situations were illustrated on posters and in advertisements. The 2008 campaign was,



as in other years, supported by the event websites www.tilllate.com and www.lautundspitz.ch, and again featured prominently in the party scene. The December wave of ads and posters marked the conclusion of the successful «Handle with care!» campaign that had run from 1999 to 2008.

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AIDS prevention messages being taken on board by young people

Preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Most young people in Switzerland are aware of the risks and protective behaviour associated with HIV. In the schools that teach knowledge of prevention, work is in progress on further improving the curriculum subject of sexual health.

In the FOPH's revised AIDS prevention programme (2009/2010), young people are perceived as a target group which, though requiring specific prevention measures, exhibits the same positive trend as the general population thanks to previous prevention efforts. This outcome is evident both in sexual behaviour, which is relevant to other sexually transmitted infections (STI) as well as HIV, and the actual HIV infection rates. The success of prevention measures is continually monitored by the Federal Government in quarterly surveys of infection rates and regular surveys of protective or risk behaviour in the general population aged 17 or over on the one hand and, on the other, in supranational research programmes whose focus includes young people below the age of 17.

Condoms used consistently

The most recent survey of young people aged between 17 and 20 produced the

following interesting findings on protective behaviour: over the last ten years the number of new steady or casual sexual partners has remained stable at a low level, with about 27% having a new steady partner in the previous year and about 18% engaging in sexual relations with one or more casual partners in the previous six months. The use of condoms with new steady partners in this period (1997–2007) rose from 74% to 80%, while condom use with casual partners remained stable at a high level (87%).

Schools offer sexual health education

The prevention tools used by the Federal Government and the cantons largely consist of the schools' sexual health education programmes. On the one hand, the counselling centres that schools turn to for sex education receive support in the form of service contracts. Under this prevention model, teachers leave the task of sex education to teams of external experts; to date, this has been the practice primarily in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. On the other hand, the Federal Government has mandated the University of Teacher Education (PHZ) in Lucerne with the task of improving teacher training in the subject of sexual health to ensure that future teachers meet this particular re-

quirement of the school curriculum more effectively.

To date, the prevention model under which teaching staff are responsible for providing sexual health education has been implemented primarily in the German-speaking region. Experts in HIV/STI prevention and sexual health are currently discussing a third way, i.e. a hybrid solution in which the advantages of the two above-mentioned models are deployed to optimum effect: the provision of good basic and advanced training for teachers on the subject of sexual health as a mandatory subject designed to ensure that it is dealt with in schools on a nationwide, continuous and age-appropriate basis, supplemented by the option of calling on external teams of experts to provide assistance with specific problems or challenges.

Satisfied with the sex education they've received

In 2007, 97% of 17–20 year olds said that they had talked about sexual health at school (2000: 87%). Their level of satisfaction with the information they have received has not changed over the last seven years: over three-quarters of interviewees stated that they had received sufficient information on HIV/AIDS and sexual health; one fifth were not satisfied with the sexual health education provided at school. There were no

marked differences between the German, French and Italian-speaking regions.

The system that provides young people in Switzerland with information on HIV/STIs and sexual health is thus still in need of improvement despite being of an already high level.

Many are already sexually active at 17. The fact that increasing numbers of young people are already sexually active at 17 shows that continuous prevention efforts need to be maintained. There has been a more or less steady trend in this respect ever since surveys began in Switzerland in the early 1970s. The figures for sexually active 17-year-olds in 2007 were 66% of boys and 55% of girls.

(Source of the socio-epidemiological findings: Institute for social and preventive medicine, University of Lausanne, 2009)

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