

Adolescents. Risk to Your Health

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Adolescence

Adolescence comes from the Latin "adolescentia" meaning "young, adolescent", however, the word is derived from the verb "adolescent" which means "grow, develop, go on the rise" which explains the derivation of the word, adolescence is also a stage of growth and development, perhaps the most crucial in an individual's life.

It is a well-defined stage of the human life cycle that lies between childhood and adulthood, characterized by profound biological, psychological and social changes many of them generating crises, conflicts and contradictions.

This is a stage in which chronologically pubertal changes begin and that responds not only to one of adaptation to bodily changes, but to a phase of great determinations towards greater psychological and social independence, they in strain situations of stress, pressures, temptations and they inquire in brains that are not yet fully developed. It's not that teenagers haven't had the time or experience to gain a broad sense of the world; simply, their brains have not yet matured physically.

Adolescence is a 10- to 19-year-old stage according to WHO [1] considerations and accounts for approximately one-sixth of the world's population (1.2 billion people) [2].

Adolescence has two phases: Early adolescence (10 to 14 years) and late adolescence (15 to 19 years).

Early adolescence is characterized by accelerated somatic growth and development, the onset of pubertal changes and secondary sexual characteristics, and there is also a concern for physical changes, it is also characterized by motor awkwardness, marked sexual curiosity, seeking autonomy and independence, so conflicts with family, teachers or other adults are more marked. The onset of sudden changes in your behavior and emotion is also common.

In the late phase much of the growth and development has culminated and an important decision-making phase is observed for its educational and occupational profile. At this stage there is also greater impulse control and maturation of identity, including the sexual sphere so that it brings the young adult closer.

In recent generations, there has been an increasingly early emergence of sexual maturation and active participation in the social, cultural and economic spheres, so it represents an important challenge for countries and in particular for health systems.

When adolescence begins, sexuality, in all its body and emotional dimension, is going to play a key role. There is little doubt that, at this time, the experience and expression of sexuality is going to be one of the most momentous issues.

During the adolescence period, different attitudes are assumed in relation to the psychological, physiological, sociocultural and biological aspects; independence is acquired; family take-off is achieved and some behaviors that negatively affect the family and social environment are generated, which can become sources of stress and unhealthy lifestyles. It is also considered a vulnerable group because they are exposed to personal and social situations leaving them fragile and helpless depending on different factors whether cultural, social and economic, that increase susceptibility to develop disease or poor health that expose them to acquire a sexually transmitted infection (STI) with significant negative consequences on sexual and reproductive health.

In adolescence there are certain risky behaviors that expose them to problems with their health such as having a sense of invulnerability” or denied mortality, identification with ideas opposed to parents, need for transgression in the process of autonomy and reaffirmation of identity [3]. This is a stage of greater probability for the development of high-risk behaviors, including the use of legal and illicit substances as well as the use of alcohol that leads to the use of other illicit drugs, such as marijuana or cocaine [4].

Excessive alcohol consumption is associated with an increased risk to mental, social or behavioral health problems and is a predictor of physical violence for both the perpetrator and the victim; associated with abnormal development of gray matter in the brain and episodic memory deficit [4].

Among the main health problems in adolescents are cited [5]:

1. Unintentional injuries and injuries: By 2019, 115,000 adolescents died as a result of a traffic accident.
2. Drowning is another major cause of adolescent death and is estimated to have drowned more than 30,000 adolescents in 2019 and more than three-quarters were male.
3. Violence: Interpersonal violence is the fourth leading cause of adolescent and young mortality in the world and 42% of adolescent males and 37% of females were exposed to bullying.
4. Mental health: Depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability in adolescents and suicide as the third leading cause of death between the age of 15 and 19. Half of all mental health disorders in adulthood are considered to begin before age 14, but are most undetected or treated.
5. Alcohol and drug use: This is a major concern in many countries as it reduces self-control and contributes to risky behaviors, such as unprotected sexual practices among others. More than a quarter of people between the world’s 15 and 19 years old (155 million adolescents) are considered to be alcohol users.
6. Tobacco use: Globally, at least 1 in 10 adolescents between the age of 13 and 15 use tobacco, although there are areas where this figure is much higher despite its dire consequences which must be taken into account, which should be prohibited from being sold to children under 18 years of age among other measures.
7. HIV infections: The 2019 statistics show that there were 1.7 million adolescents (between the age of 10 and 19) living with HIV, representing about 10% of all new adult HIV infections, which are associated with the risks they are at when having unprotected sex.
8. Other infections: We take human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, which occurs once the person begins to have sex without proper protection by causing short-term genital warts that can lead to cervical cancers among other cancer conditions.

9. Early pregnancies and births: Every year, approximately 12 million adolescents and young people between the age of 15 and 19, and at least 777,000 girls under the age of 15, give birth in developing regions, making complications related to them the leading cause of death among 15 - 19 year olds worldwide.

It should also be noted that exposure to violence (victims and observers of violence) in its various forms is a powerful factor through which children and adolescents learn aggressive behavior through imitation of aggressive models, direct active reinforcement of aggressive acts and strengthening through observational learning. This is supported by numerous studies that have found a positive association between exposure to violence in different contexts (school, neighborhood, home and television (TV) and the development of aggressive behaviors in childhood and adolescence [6].

Hence it is said that teenagers respond poorly to the kind of thinking that requires looking to the future to visualize the outcome of their actions, a feature that evaluates the ability to take risks and that the ability to assess risks, appears between the 15 - 18 years, Rossell published in 2003 [7].

Given the importance of this stage, WHO calls for greater attention to adolescent health to prevent deaths, the risks they are subjected to in order to contribute and improve their health.

We can say that in our day adolescents worldwide, present behaviors not in line with the values and standards of conduct that education systems aim to enhance. This situation is not a consequence of the critical nature of the stage, but also of inadequate management that is largely carried out during the process of educating the personality of adolescents, both in the school and family space. In this sense, it is that we raise the existence of a crisis in the educational field, which stokes the negative effects of the crisis of adolescence.

In turn, it is also important that we try to clarify what may be the cause of these deficiencies in the educational process? In our view, this fact may be conditioned by the disrecognition of the regularities of adolescence as a psychological age and, therefore, of the ways to exert on adolescents the most positive and desired educational influences.

From a more general perspective, it is undeniable that the education of the adolescent's personality takes place in a certain social, historical and cultural context, where we witness a crisis of values in certain cases there, the complexity of the educational process for teachers and parents.

In general, WHO plays a range of roles in improving youth health, including making recommendations to governments on adolescent health and providing high-quality, age-appropriate adolescent health services; documents progress in adolescent health and development; among others, it documents progress in adolescent health and development; and promotes awareness of youth health issues among the general public and different stakeholders.

Final Considerations

Health education is an essential component at all stages of life but it takes on special significance in adolescence because it is the ideal time to train them in a responsible and productive way for society; so that the investments made in them during this stage will yield great profits for several future generations, if not done there will be considerable costs for people, the community and society.

Promoting relationships of care and affection between parents and children at an early stage of life, promotes the development of life skills.

It is put in the hands of staff linked to working with adolescents including parents and/or guardians, this small article which will allow to be in the best condition to detect these behaviors thus contributing to exercise and take actions that prevent it.

It is also up to the health personnel working with this vulnerable group, to be aware of the characteristics of this stage of life and these differences, to propose and establish strategies that contribute to the education of parents, families, teachers, lawyers, decision makers, community as a whole, that promote the establishment of public policies that advocate to understand, anticipate and manage the behavior of adolescents and to lay the foundations for the construction of positive health in this population, future of society and responsible for its development.

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