

Fact Sheet No 92
Revised June 1998

WHO'S GLOBAL SCHOOL HEALTH INITIATIVE:

HELPING SCHOOLS TO BECOME "HEALTH-PROMOTING SCHOOLS"

Health is directly linked to educational achievement, quality of life and economic productivity. Research in both developing and developed countries demonstrates that school health programmes can simultaneously reduce common health problems, increase the efficiency of the education system and advance public health, education and social and economic development in each nation.

Promoting the health of children through schools has long been an important task of WHO, beginning in 1950 when the Expert Committee on School Health Services laid the first theoretical groundwork for concerted worldwide action. In 1986 WHO and UNICEF published *Helping a Billion Children to Learn About Health* based on the findings of an international consultation on health learning. In November 1991 an expert consultation was jointly convened by WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO to gain a common understanding of comprehensive school health education and to outline action for countries to consider to strengthen implementation. From WHO's contemporary perspective, school health programmes are today one of the critical factors for realizing Health For All.

WHO'S GLOBAL SCHOOL HEALTH INITIATIVE

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Global School Health Initiative has consequently become one of the Organization's primary health promotion efforts. The general direction of WHO's Initiative is guided by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986) and the Declaration of the Fourth International Conference on Health Promotion held in Jakarta (1997). (WHO's Fact Sheet No 171 contains further details on the Ottawa Charter and Jakarta Declaration; <http://www.who.int/inf-fs/en/fact171.html>). It is also guided by the recommendations of WHO's Expert Committee on Comprehensive School Health Education and Promotion (1995), while WHO's Division of Health Promotion, Education and Communication (WHO/HPR) is charged with the Initiative's implementation and also with maintaining the secretariat for WHO's inter-divisional Working Group on School Health.

Launched in 1995, the Initiative seeks to mobilize and strengthen health promotion and education activities at the local, national, regional and global levels. Its goal is to increase the number of schools that can truly be called "Health-Promoting Schools". Although definitions will vary, depending on need and circumstance, a Health-Promoting School can be characterized as a school constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working. A Health-Promoting School:

- strives to improve the health of school personnel, families and community members as well as students;
- fosters health and learning with all the measures at its disposal;
- engages health and education officials, teachers and their representative organizations, students, parents and community leaders in efforts to make the school a healthy place;
- strives to provide a healthy environment, school health education and school health services along with school/community projects and outreach, health promotion programmes for staff, nutrition and food safety programmes, opportunities for physical education and recreation and programmes for counselling, social support and mental health promotion;
- implements policies and practices that respect an individual's self-esteem, provide multiple opportunities for success and acknowledge good efforts and intentions as well as personal achievements.

Four strategies to create Health-Promoting Schools

1. Strengthening the ability to advocate for improved school health programmes

WHO generates technical documents that consolidate research and expert opinion about the nature, scope and effectiveness of school health programmes. The materials are designed to help individuals in international, national and local organizations argue effectively for increased support of efforts to promote health through schools. They are also designed to help policy- and decision-makers justify decisions to increase support for such efforts. Basic documents include:

- *The Status of School Health*, WHO/HPR/HEP/96.1;
- *Improving School Health Programmes: Barriers and Strategies*, WHO/HPR/HEP/96.2;
- *Research to Improve Implementation and Effectiveness of School Health Programmes*, WHO/HPR/HEP/96.3;
- *Promoting Health Through Schools: A Summary and Recommendations of WHO's Expert Committee on Comprehensive School Health Education and Promotion*, WHO/HPR/HEP/96.4.

To help individuals and groups advocate for the development of Health-Promoting Schools, WHO produces an "Information Series on School Health". Each document in the Series provides strong arguments for addressing one or more important health issues through schools, describes the concept and

qualities of a Health-Promoting School and delineates multiple ways in which the health issue(s) is addressed in a Health-Promoting School. While each document in the Series addresses a priority health issue, it also focuses on the positive affects that will be accrued by the education sector if the issue is effectively addressed. Documents in this Series include (and can be downloaded free of charge from the following website:

<http://www.who.int/hpr/gshi/index.html>):

- *Local Action: Creating Health-Promoting Schools*, WHO/HPR/HEP/98;
- *Primary School Physical Environment and Health*, WHO/School/97.2, WHO/EOS/97.15;
- *Healthy Nutrition: An Essential Element of a Health-Promoting School*, WHO/HPR/HEP/98.3;
- *Preventing HIV/AIDS/STDs and Related Discrimination: An Important Responsibility of Health-Promoting Schools*, WHO/HPR/HEP/98;
- *Active Living: An Essential Element of a Health-Promoting School*, WHO/HPR/HEP/98;
- *Tobacco Use Prevention: An Important Entry Point for the Development of a Health-Promoting School*, WHO/HPR/HEP/98.

2. Creating Networks and Alliances for the development of Health-Promoting Schools

WHO's Regional Networks for the Development of Health-Promoting Schools may be the world's most comprehensive and successful international effort to mobilize support for school health promotion. The first Network was initiated by the European Regional Office of WHO, the Council of Europe and the Commission of the European Communities in 1991. This Network has grown in six years to include 34 countries, 500 core schools and 1 600 affiliated schools, reaching about 400 000 students.

In conjunction with the Global School Health Initiative, Regional Networks for the Development of Health-Promoting Schools were started in the Western Pacific (1995), Latin America (1996) and Southern Africa (1996) through joint efforts by WHO/HQ and the respective WHO Regional Offices. In 1997, meetings were held to develop Networks in South-East Asia and the northern countries of the Western Pacific. Each Network will be composed of public and private organizations interested in planning and working together toward the goal of helping schools become Health-Promoting Schools.

Additionally, WHO works in alliance with Education International (EI), UNAIDS and UNESCO to enable teachers' representative organizations throughout the world to use their unique capacities and experience to improve health through schools. Special emphasis has been placed in strengthening policies, curricula and training programmes that can help prevent HIV infection and related discrimination. In 1997, teachers' representative organizations in Asia and Central Europe were assisted by the WHO-EI-UNAIDS-UNESCO alliance.

3. Strengthening national capacities

As part of the development of WHO's Mega-Countries Health Promotion Network, WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USA) periodically bring together persons responsible for health promotion and school health from the countries with the largest populations. Participants exchange strategies and experience and work together to improve health promotion and school health programmes on a large scale.

In 1997, WHO also provided technical support for country-level action to create Health-Promoting Schools. WHO worked with China and South Africa to use priority health issues as entry points for the development of Health-Promoting Schools. WHO worked with China to strengthen national and local capacities for helminth control and prevention and to strengthen HIV/STD prevention efforts in schools. WHO worked with South Africa to use helminth control and prevention and violence prevention as entry points. Experiences gained in these efforts are diffused through the Regional Networks of Health-Promoting Schools.

4. Research to improve school health programmes

WHO consolidates existing research about action that can improve health through schools. It also fosters the development of ways to: 1) assess national capacity for school health promotion; 2) evaluate the extent to which schools become Health-Promoting Schools; and 3) monitor the health status of children and teachers.

WHO's Rapid Assessment and Action Planning Process is being developed by the WHO Collaborating Centre to Promote Health Through Schools and Communities, Education Development Center, Inc., Newton, Massachusetts. The Process helps countries assess national capacity for school health promotion. WHO works with partner agencies to develop methods for evaluating the extent to which schools become Health-Promoting Schools and the extent to which students are practising healthy lifestyles. An evaluation of the extent to which helminth interventions could be used to create Health-Promoting Schools in China was completed in 1997. In the *World Health Report of 1998* (<http://www.who.ch/whr/1998/whr-en.htm>), WHO reports on the health status and trends among school-age children and adolescents.

Partnerships and Supports key to success of School Health Initiative

WHO recognizes that the success of the Global School Health Initiative rests on the extent to which partnerships can be formed at local, national and international levels. This will require organizations interested in promoting health through schools to identify individuals with responsibility, time and authority to work in partnerships with others. It will also require them to jointly develop mechanisms that enable their organizations to document their achievements and improve their programmes.

WHO is taking an active lead to ensure that the health promotion principles of the 1986 Ottawa Charter and the health promotion guidelines of the 1997 Jakarta Declaration are diffused worldwide and applied in the development of Health-Promoting Schools. The concept of Health-Promoting Schools is a sound

vision for a better world. WHO's Global School Health Initiative invites all governmental and nongovernmental organizations, development banks, organizations of the United Nations system, interregional bodies, bilateral agencies, the labour movement and cooperatives, as well as the private sector to help advance health promotion action as called for in the Jakarta Declaration.

For further information, journalists can contact the WHO Office of Public Information, Geneva. Telephone (41 22) 791 2584. Fax (41 22) 791 4858. E-Mail: info@who.ch

All WHO Press Releases, Fact Sheets and Features as well as other information on this subject can be obtained on Internet on the WHO home page <http://www.who.ch/>

© WHO/OMS, 1998 | [Concept](#)