Adolescents & Non-Communicable Diseases
at a GLANCE

Adolescents represent the well-being of a society and its development potential - and good health helps ensure independence, security, and productivity across the life course (the World Health Organization defines young people as individuals between the ages of 10 and 24 years old. Adolescents comprise the 10-19 year-old age group and youth the 15-24 year old age group). Many NCDs are associated with behaviors that are established in adolescence, including harmful use of alcohol, tobacco use, sedentary lifestyle, and an unhealthy diet, which disproportionately affects poor, vulnerable and less educated sections of our communities.

The good news is that it is much easier to establish positive health behaviors early in life than to change risk behaviors during middle-age. We can improve the quality of lives of adolescents through multisectorial collaboration by scaling-up evidence-based interventions, so that all adolescents live a healthy life.

The Costs of Non-Communicable Diseases (*1*)

- The economic burden of NCDs is estimated to cause a cumulative global output loss of $47 trillion USD over the next two decades, with Latin America and the Caribbean facing the largest economic burden from NCDs.
- NCDs are both a cause and effect of poverty: there is a high prevalence of NCDs among the poor, less educated sectors of society, and long-term treatment often results in impoverishment.

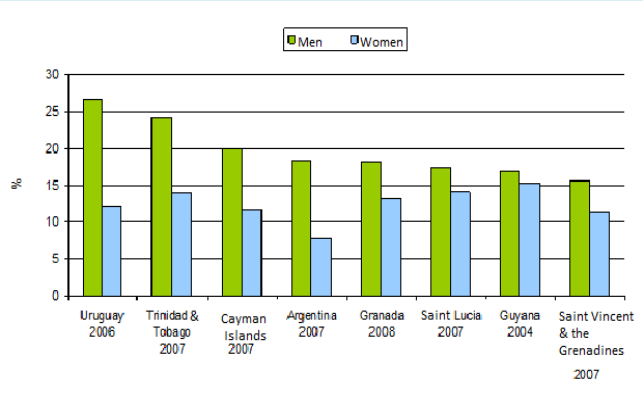
Where do Youth of Latin America and the Caribbean stand? (*2*)

- They represent 30% of the total population.
- 39% of youth 15-24 years of age are poor, while 22 million are unemployed.
- Between 50-80% of 15-19 year olds attend school (*3*).
- 25-32% of 12-24 year olds engage in risky behaviors (*2*).

Obesity and Physical Activity

- The Americas has the highest proportion of overweight/obese adolescents in the world.
- Approximately 21% of adolescents in the Region are overweight while 6% are obese (*4*).
- Studies have found that when overweight adolescents become adults they are twice as likely to develop cardiovascular disease (CVD) and have 7 times greater risk of atherosclerosis (*5*).
- Research done in 8 countries in the Region found that less than 30% of students 10-24 years of age were physically active (table 1) (*2*).

TABLE 1. Percentage of physically active students 10-24 years of age in 8 countries



Source: PAHO, 2010 (*6*)

Consumption of Alcohol, Drugs, and Tobacco

- Adolescent smoking is more common now than ever before with more young girls starting to smoke than boys.
- In the Region, 25% of adolescents 13-15 years of age smoke (*2*).
- In Canada, 5% of young people reported trying smoking when they were 11 years or younger, 16% of boys and 18% of girls when they were between 12-14 years of age, and 6% when they were 15 years of age or older (*7*).

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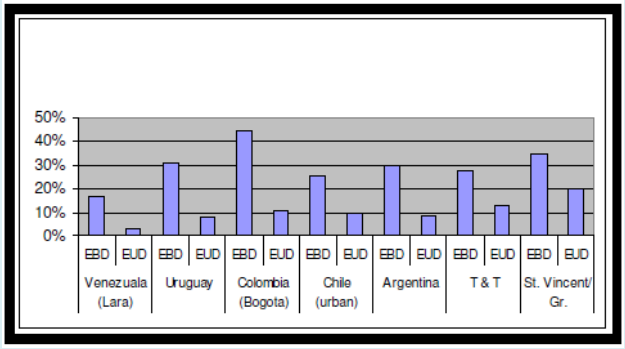
- Alcohol use starts at a young age: 14% of girls and 18% of boys 13- 15 years of age in low- and middle-income countries report use (table 2) (*8*).
- A study done in the Caribbean found that 40% of females and 54% of males 12-18 years consumed alcohol (*9*).
- In the Region, alcohol consumption among 12-15 year olds ranges from 18.1% (Guatemala) to 68.3% (Bermuda) (*10*).

TABLE 2. Self-reported drug and alcohol use among high school students 13-15 years of age in The Americas



Source: Global Student Health Survey (8)

Sexual and Reproductive Health

- Cervical cancer is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in the Americas; an estimated 80,574 new cases are reported each year globally, with 85% of the burden occurring in LAC (*11*).
- Half a million cervical cancer deaths could be prevented over the next 10 years with the introduction of the HPV vaccine in the region amongst adolescent girls (*12*).
- In 2011, only 6 countries in the Region had adopted universal HPV vaccination to protect against cervical cancer.

Links

- Adolescent and Youth Regional Strategy and Plan of Action 2010-2018: http://new.paho.org/hq/dmdocuments/2011/Adolescent%20and%20Youth%20Regional%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action.pdf

- Non-Communicable Diseases in the Americas: Basic Indicators 2011: http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=14991&Itemid=

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3. The Economic Commission for Latin America. Plataforma para la gestión social basada en el conocimiento. Consulted on March 18, 2012. http://www.risalc.org/portal/indicadores/nuevos.php.
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