



World Health  
Organization

## INTRODUCTION



# Life skills education school handbook

Prevention of noncommunicable diseases

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# INTRODUCTION

School health programmes have been demonstrated to be the most cost-effective way to influence health behaviours in young people (7–4). The purpose of this two-part handbook is to support schools as they seek to implement interventions aimed at reducing the main modifiable risk behaviours for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) (5,6). The background provided in this *Introduction handbook* and the approaches and advice outlined in the *Practical application handbook* focuses on providing young people with the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and life skills necessary for making informed decisions, and creating a healthy school environment that can reduce the risk of NCDs (7).

In essence, the over-arching key messages of the handbook are as follows:

- NCDs are a global health concern, with more than 36 million people worldwide dying from NCDs each year.
- Most NCD-related deaths are preventable.
- The primary and secondary school education system is a prime location for NCD prevention given that a large portion of a child's day is spent in these settings.
- Life skills learning at school creates an opportunity to introduce key components of a healthy lifestyle to young people from an early age.
- Comprehensive school-based physical activity programmes should be implemented to provide numerous opportunities for physical activity, such as structured physical education classes, physical activity breaks, and 'walk/bicycle to school' initiatives.
- Schools provide students with opportunities to consume an array of foods and beverages throughout the day and should, therefore, provide nutritious food choice options, allowing students to learn about and practice healthy eating behaviours.
- Schools can also encourage family involvement and support in leading a healthy lifestyle, as an individual's lifestyle behaviours are likely to mirror those of the people they live and/or closely associate with.



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### Global health literacy: a background

Health literacy is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be one of the pillars of health promotion and a critical determinant of health for people's empowerment (8). In 2016, educational settings were highlighted during the Ninth Global Conference on Health Promotion as important settings for investing in the development of health literacy for young people, through life skills-based school curricula (8). The *Shanghai Declaration* that was endorsed by conference delegates was part of a global determination and commitment to focus on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (9).

One of the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 is to provide students with all the knowledge and skills necessary for their own sustainable development (10). Utilizing school health education to promote health literacy can be challenging, but is a basic pre-requisite for students' empowerment and to enable them to adopt healthy lifestyles over their lifetimes (8).

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# THE CONTEXT

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