



Key messages

The key messages for each theme of the European Public Health WEEK 2019 are based on evidence and resources shared by a variety of sources, including:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe
- The European Commission (e.g. through the State of Health in the EU – Companion report 2017)
- EUPHA Sections, EUPHA members and EUPHANxt
- Experts from the Council of Occupational Therapists for European Countries (COTEC), World Federation of Physical Therapy – European Region (WCPT), Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD) and Euro Youth Mental Health (EYMH).

Unless stated otherwise, messages refer to all 53 Member States of the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Please refer to the [media toolkit](#) for guidance on how to best use the key messages.

Monday 13 May - Becoming, being and remaining physically active

Motto of the day: "I like to move it, move it."

The subthemes of this day are: Activity-friendly environments; work and health; rehabilitation; sickness absence; healthy ageing; social security benefits.

Key messages

1. Physical activity is very easy if you make walking to work, cycling or taking the stairs a deliberate part of your daily routine.
2. Physical activity and participation in sports have been proven to be beneficial for mental health, depression, and social inclusion.
3. Being physically active in younger years and continuing in later years contributes to healthy ageing.
4. It helps older people to achieve better quality of life, independence, maintenance of mobility, better performance in daily tasks, better cognitive function, better mood, lower risk for frailty, and lower mortality.
5. Health, education, sports, urban planning and transport sectors, as well as the workplace, community groups and the media benefit directly from investing in the physical activity of their customers, workers and students.
6. Employees who are physically active are healthier, happier, and less likely to take sick days. By promoting physical activity and active travel, employers can improve staff wellbeing, increase work attendance and decrease job stress.

Other facts and figures

- 1 in 3 adults in Europe is not sufficiently active.
- Physical inactivity is one of the leading risk factors for overweight, obesity and noncommunicable diseases and chronic conditions. In 46 countries of the European Region, over half the population is overweight or obese.
- WHO recommends that adults (including older adults) undertake at least 150 min of moderate-intensity or 75 min of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity or an equivalent combination each week.
- Based on research in European Union countries, overweight affects up to 70% and obesity affects up to 30% of adults. Many children are also overweight or obese.
- 46% of people in the European Union report never exercising or playing sports.
- Specific populations should especially be targeted for physical activity interventions, such as people with disabilities, adolescent girls, women, people with overweight or obesity, people of low-socioeconomic status and migrants.
- Reducing physical inactivity in Europe would lead to substantial improvements in health, the environment, individual quality of life, social participation and resilience.
- To protect children and younger people it is important to reduce marketing and advertisement of alcohol and high fat, sugar and salt foods, particularly at sport clubs and sport events.

- Parents can be role models for their children by demonstrating active behaviours, encouraging them to be physically active.

Physical activity in older populations

- As people age, they become more vulnerable to disease and disability. However, much of this burden can be reduced or prevented by adequately addressing specific risk factors, from preventing falls and social exclusion to promoting better long-term care.
- Promoting healthy ageing also means rethinking the role that the elderly play in our society, such as by actively participating in the social, economic and cultural life.
- The health benefits of physical activity are well recognised. They include reducing risks for NCDs, depression and stress reactions and possibly delaying the effects of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Tuesday 14 May - Healthy environments

Motto of the day: “Healthy environments make healthy people”

The subthemes of this day are: Urban health; air pollution; green zones; blue zones; road infrastructure and road safety; water and sanitation; healthy communities and neighbourhoods.

Key messages

1. Active travel such as walking and cycling brings significant health benefits and reduces air pollution and traffic congestion.
2. Urban green spaces provide opportunities for active lifestyles and protection against Summertime heat stress.
3. Contact with nature is an essential component of healthy cities.
4. Investing in integrated and inclusive models for urban development can promote healthy ageing by extending the age of independence for older and disabled people.
5. Safer roads save lives.
6. It is essential for human health and wellbeing to have easy access to adequate sanitation and sufficient amounts of safe water for drinking and hygiene at home, schools and health care facilities.

Other facts and figures

Air pollution

- Breathing is the most basic human function to sustain life. Yet, air pollution is the single largest environmental health risk in Europe.
- Every year, air pollution causes nearly 500 000 premature deaths across 41 European nations.
- Reducing air pollution to the WHO air quality guideline levels would result in gains of up to 22 months of average life expectancy. It would also contribute to reducing lung and heart diseases, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women and older people.
- In addition to cardiovascular- and respiratory-related non-communicable diseases, evidence is emerging of other effects of air pollution, such as diabetes, neurological development issues in children and neurological problems in adults.
- Vegetation along congested roads absorbs carbon dioxide and offers a physical barrier to direct exposure to humans.

Urban health

- Greater access to information regarding accessible services and places helps physically impaired people to get more engaged in society, and to maintain relationships with family and friends.
- Nature, or even pictures of nature in the office or living room, improves the perceived quality of the environment, attention restoration and wellbeing at home, work or school.
- Preventing exposure to chemicals in our daily lives can result in health cost savings of 10% of the global GDP.

Road safety

- Excessive noise seriously harms human health and interferes with people's daily activities at school, at work, at home and during leisure time. It can disturb sleep, cause physical and psychological problems, reduce performance and provoke changes in social behaviour.
- Road traffic injuries are a major public health problem in the WHO European Region and cause the premature deaths of some 120 000 people every year.
- Road traffic injuries cause a substantial economic loss to society: up to 3% of the gross domestic product of any given country.
- On average, 70 people die every day on European Union roads.

Water and sanitation

- Diseases related to inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) include diarrhea, but also other disease outcomes such as hepatitis A, legionellosis and soil-transmitted infections. Infants and children under 5 years of age are particularly vulnerable to diarrhea as a leading cause of malnutrition and death.
- In the Caucasus and central Asia, less than 40% of rural dwellers use piped water on premises.
- In the event of climate change bringing draught or extreme precipitation, disaster preparedness as well as organised prevention of vector-borne diseases are required.

Wednesday 15 May - Care 4 care

Motto of the day: "Taking care of what takes care of you."

The subthemes of this day are: Prevention in healthcare; (self-)management of chronic diseases; primary healthcare; health services research; health workforce research; access to healthcare; health insurance; healthcare reform.

Key messages

1. Health promotion and disease prevention pave the way for a more efficient health system and enable people to live and age in good health.
2. There is no health without a workforce, thus policy-makers should invest in health workforce development needs.
3. Multidisciplinary teams are better able to improve patients' health, prevent disease and reduce hospitalisation.
4. At its heart, primary healthcare is about caring for people and helping them improve their health and wellbeing rather than just treating specific diseases or conditions.
5. Primary healthcare professionals have a continuing and trusted relationship with their patients and know their health history. Knowing the full picture helps improve their care and saves money.
6. A strong primary healthcare guides patients through the health system and helps avoid wasteful spending.
7. It is important to invest in the knowledge and skills of patients and their informal carers, encouraging their active participation in decision-making and self-management of diseases.
8. Technology solutions improve access to healthcare in deprived areas, enable coordination between services and help patients manage their diseases.

Other facts and figures

Health workforce

- Health workers are at risk of acquiring infectious diseases through exposure at work. They may also suffer from psychological stress, which affects both their work and personal lives.
- The nurses to doctors ratio in the EU varies from 1.1 in Bulgaria to 4.6 in Denmark and Finland.
- Health workforce imbalances and shortages are a major concern in the European Region.
- Population growth, ageing societies, and changing disease patterns are expected to drive greater demand for well-trained health workers in the next 15 years.
- The right skills-mix of health workers is indispensable for effective and efficient health care delivery.
- Health professionals have a crucial role to play in educating patients on how to take care of their health, coordinating care and advocating for their patients' needs.

Informal caregivers and home care

- The ups and downs in a patient's illness can have a deep impact on informal caregivers. It is important to preserve their physical and mental health and their resilience.
- People providing informal care deserve to feel included in society and see their full potential recognised.
- Informal care provided by family and friends will need to be supported to allow people with functional limitations to stay at home as long as possible.
- Informal care accounts for most hours of care in all European countries, even in those where the elderly care sector receives the largest public support.
- The provision of services in patients' homes is typically more cost-effective than in institutions, particularly if informal care is used effectively.

Technology and e-health

- Technology and e-Health solutions applied in the healthcare sector help to tailor services to people with complex healthcare needs, particularly those with chronic conditions.
- Technological innovation expands the number of problems that primary care can effectively solve.

Navigating the healthcare system ("Integrated care")

- More than one in four patients across the EU visit an emergency department because of inadequate primary care.
- European healthcare systems are still designed to manage single diseases instead of complex conditions with multiple needs, particularly chronic diseases. This fragmented care is associated with over-prescribing, over-hospitalisation, and poor patient satisfaction.
- Chronic conditions such as cancer and diabetes account for up to 80% of total healthcare spending in Europe, yet only around 3% of health budgets are spent on prevention. Prevention tackles non-communicable diseases effectively.
- Deaths from major noncommunicable diseases translate into EUR 115 billion in potential economic loss each year.
- Healthcare systems need to adapt to emerging changes such as climate change, ageing population, antimicrobial resistance, new technologies, new medications and new models of care and finance.

Thursday 16 May - Sustainable and healthy diets

Motto of the day: “A healthy diet while taking care of our planet.”

The subthemes of this day are: Healthy diets; sustainable agriculture; food production; food system transformation; food safety laws; fat tax and sugar tax.

Key messages

1. A diet that includes more plant-based foods and fewer animal source foods is healthy, sustainable, and good for both people and the planet. It is not a question of all or nothing, but rather small changes for a large and positive impact.
2. Intake of sugars can be reduced by limiting the consumption of foods and drinks containing high amounts of sugars and eating fresh fruit and raw vegetables as snacks.
3. Eating has a strong social component. Sharing meals with others helps to maintain mental health and tackle social isolation.
4. It is important to make the healthy option the easier option for consumers.
5. Healthy dietary practices start early in life – breastfeeding fosters healthy growth and improves cognitive development.

Other facts and figures

- Unhealthy diets together with lack of physical activity are leading global risks to health.
- The food we eat, the ways we produce it from farm to fork, and the amounts wasted or lost have major impacts on human health and environmental sustainability. Getting it right with food will help to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change.
- Food insecurity has dramatic effects on the health of children and the elderly in particular, influencing educational progress, family stress, and nutritional deficiencies.
- Excessive consumption of saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, sugar and salt increase the risk of overweight and obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and several types of cancer - the main cause of illness and disability across the European Region.
- Childhood overweight and obesity are a major issue throughout the European Region, with more than 40% of children aged 7-9 years being overweight.
- Food transportation with a low carbon footprint, as well as economical and sensible exploitation of land and water in food production represent important health resources.

Friday 17 May - Youth mental health

Motto of the day: "I am me even when I'm bruised."

The subthemes of this day are: Mental health public services; healthy sleep patterns; online and offline balance; social relationships; supportive peers.

Key messages

1. Having good mental health as well as physical health enables young people to deal with the challenges of adolescence and eases their transition into adulthood.
2. Mental health and wellbeing during adolescence are strongly influenced by life experiences and relationships. Key protective factors include a sense of parent and family connectedness, with social support supplied by at least one caring adult.
3. Children and adolescents need safe, secure, inclusive homes, schools and social environments in which to develop and thrive.
4. A positive and respectful approach to sexuality, gender diversity and sexual orientation is important for a healthy development of adolescents and helps to prevent mental health problems.
5. The Internet is a tool which can be used to improve our lives by helping us find information or connect with others. Internet is just a tool - use it for your own benefit, do not let it use you.

Other facts and figures

- Up to 1 in 5 adolescents in the European Union live with psychological or behavioural problems.
- Mental health problems can have damaging effects on young people's social, intellectual and emotional development and consequently on their future. The adolescent years are a critical life stage for actions to protect and promote mental health and wellbeing for the long term.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in high-income countries in the European Region in younger age groups. It accounts for 18% of all deaths among people between 15 and 29 years old.
- Social, psychological, cultural and other factors can interact to lead a person to suicidal behaviour, but the stigma attached to mental disorders and suicide means that many people feel unable to seek help.
- Factors associated with poor mental health and wellbeing include bullying, lack of acceptance by peers and lack of support from parents and teachers.
- About half of all mental health problems in adulthood have their onset during or before adolescence.
- Services and practice do not always reflect the knowledge of what works in mental health care and treatment. Many countries have limited community-based mental health services and little specialist help for young or elderly people.
- Young children with intellectual disabilities are an extremely vulnerable group often subjected to discrimination and neglect.

- Supportive parenting, a secure home life and a positive learning environment in school are key factors in building and protecting mental health and wellbeing in adolescence.
- The digital world has introduced new risks for young people: social platforms can be tools for cyber-bullying and have a harmful impact promoting body image concerns and disordered eating.
- Smartphones can track details of people's physical and mood changes, which allows clinicians real-time access to their patients' feelings and behaviour. They can also deliver psycho-education. But unprecedented access to information brings issues of reliability and confidentiality.