

# What IS Adolescent Medicine?

The specialty of adolescent medicine has developed in response to the unique health care needs of adolescents. Knowledge of the physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes that adolescents undergo, as well as disease processes that occur during adolescence is vital when caring for patients in this age group. Although adolescence is normally thought of as a healthy period of life, significant health care problems often occur during this time:

- Causes of adolescent morbidity and mortality are often a result of negative behavioral and social forces.
- Accidental injuries, suicide and homicide now account for more than 75 percent of all adolescent deaths.
- It is estimated that nearly one fourth of all adolescents between the ages of 10 and 17 are at very high risk for substance abuse, delinquency, and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases or school failure. Substance abuse, including alcohol, drug and tobacco use, often begins during the teen years.
- Many of the AIDS cases reported in the United States are individuals in their twenties. It is likely that these young people acquired their infection during their adolescent years.

Chronic illness also affects increasing numbers of adolescents, as physicians are able to deal more effectively with diseases in children. Most investigators estimate the prevalence of chronic disease in the adolescent population to be approximately 10 percent. These adolescents must deal with the burden of their illness while struggling to achieve the tasks of normal adolescent development.

Many problems of adulthood begin in adolescence. Lifestyle and behavioral decisions made during the adolescent years may profoundly and permanently affect adult health and well-being. Choices and behaviors can be influenced by education and counseling during adolescence.

## General Health

[www.kidshealth.org/teen](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen)

this is a comprehensive website for health information, with sections for parents, kids and teens. Topics range from general information about your body and health to specific diseases and advice on school, jobs, talking with teens, and more.

[www.girlshealth.gov](http://www.girlshealth.gov)

Designed specifically for girls, this website is a fun way to learn about everything from nutrition and your body to your emotions and relationships.

## Eating Disorders

[www.nationaleatingdisorders.org](http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)

The NEDA (National Eating Disorders Association) website has a lot of useful information about what eating disorders are, treatment options, and forums for support.

Especially useful on this site is the “Parents Toolkit” which includes information about navigating insurance coverage when trying to find treatment for a child with an eating disorder.

<http://www.documentarywire.com/killing-us-softly-3>

### **Sexuality**

[www.growingamericanyouth.org](http://www.growingamericanyouth.org)

this is the website of a St. Louis-based group that supports and empowers gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning teens. It has info for their weekly discussion meetings and other local events.

### **Substance Abuse**

[www.ncada-stl.org](http://www.ncada-stl.org)

The National Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse provide information and services related to substance abuse and addiction. They also offer free assessments for adolescents.

### **Community Advocacy and Resources**

[cap4kids.org/stlouis/](http://cap4kids.org/stlouis/)

The Children’s Advocacy Project website links to a variety of resources including food and nutrition, insurance, pregnancy resources and teen-specific needs. You can also print out a variety of parent handouts.