

The realities of a digital world and what it means for young people's health

Digitalisation has changed our lives and everyday routines fundamentally. It also has an influence on our health and especially the health of children and adolescents, who were born into a digital world and who have grown up with the internet. Digital media and new technologies offer remarkable opportunities to engage and empower young people to drive change, and most children who are online view it as a positive experience. Digital technologies can bring opportunities for learning, education, and employment. However, growing up in a digital world can also pose threats to physical and mental health.

One concern is about the dangers of excessive screen time. Time spent online is contributing to more sedentary lifestyles and to growing levels of overweight and obesity. There are concerns about cyberbullying, anxiety, gaming, and gambling. In addition, it is more difficult to put in place protections to keep youth from purchasing harmful products in the on-line world than in the real world. The Internet is also becoming increasingly commercialised, since the majority of digital media rely on business models centred on advertising. An online presence exposes children and young people to new and evolving forms of digital marketing.

Digitalisation represents a new challenge for public health. Current knowledge and public health approaches are not adequately developed to understand and address the challenges, benefits, and impacts of digital technology on children and young people's health. There is an absence of effective guidance and regulations of digital media in many countries. We need to establish dialogue between experts in public health, law, and emerging technologies – as well young people themselves - to fully grasp the issues.

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