**Country:** Central African Republic

**Committee:** World Health Organization

**Topic:** Adolescent health in developing countries

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Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It is a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying the foundations of good health.

Adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth. This affects how they feel, think, make decisions, and interact with the world around them. Despite being thought of as a healthy stage of life, there is significant death, illness and injury in the adolescent years. Much of this is preventable or treatable. During this phase, adolescents establish patterns of behaviour – for instance, related to diet, physical activity, substance use, and sexual activity – that can protect their health and the health of others around them, or put their health at risk now and in the future.

As they transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents acquire the physical, cognitive, emotional, social and economic resources that serve as the foundation for health and well-being later in life. But this is also a vulnerable period in which girls and boys are exposed to new risks. It is a period in which gender norms consolidate, often to the disadvantage of girls. The onset of puberty can be a signal for constraining girls’ movement, schooling, sexuality and life exposure.

Adolescent girls in regions like West and Central Africa also face social pressures to marry and bear children, jeopardizing their ability to acquire the education and resources needed for adulthood and resulting in lifelong consequences for girls, their children and their communities.

the CAR government and international partners have taken steps to improve adolescent health in the country. For example, the government has implemented policies and programs aimed at improving access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning and HIV testing and counseling. International partners, such as UNICEF and the World Health Organization, have also supported initiatives aimed at improving adolescent health in the CAR. This includes the provision of vaccines, such as the HPV vaccine, to reduce the risk of cervical cancer, as well as support for education and awareness campaigns to promote healthy behaviors and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

To grow and develop in good health, adolescents need information, including age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education; opportunities to develop life skills; health services that are acceptable, equitable, appropriate and effective; and safe and supportive environments. They also need opportunities to meaningfully participate in the design and delivery of interventions to improve and maintain their health. Expanding such opportunities is key to responding to adolescents’ specific needs and rights. Adolescents should be empowered to make decisions about their own health and well-being. This includes providing them with access to accurate and age-appropriate information about health issues, as well as involving them in the design and delivery of healthcare services and also poor health outcomes among adolescents are often linked to broader social and economic factors, such as poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality. Addressing these social determinants of health can improve adolescent health outcomes and reduce health disparities.