

## Characteristics of school health: How are they learned and taught?

### Learning objectives

You will be able to gain proper understanding and explain:

- What it means for people to live healthy lives, in terms of their life cycle.
- The characteristics and importance of school health as a school subject.
- Health as a personal matter.
- The link between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and school health.
- Why it is significant for students aspiring to be teachers to study school health and teach it to children, and increase students' interest in the contents of this textbook including 16 chapters.

Targeting students in the teacher training course who use this textbook to study school health and will teach it to children in the future, this book discusses the characteristics of the subject of school health, how to study and teach it, and the points that should be understood.

### 1. What does it mean for people to live a lifetime in good health?

What does it mean for a person to live a lifetime in good health? A healthy human life begins when a healthy sperm meets a healthy egg, resulting in healthy fertilization (Figure 0.1). The healthy fertilized egg divides and eventually forms a fetus, which grows and develops healthily in the healthy womb of the healthy mother and is born healthy through a healthy delivery upon reaching full term. The healthy baby grows and develops healthily and eventually matures sexually. A healthy adult will work, enjoy

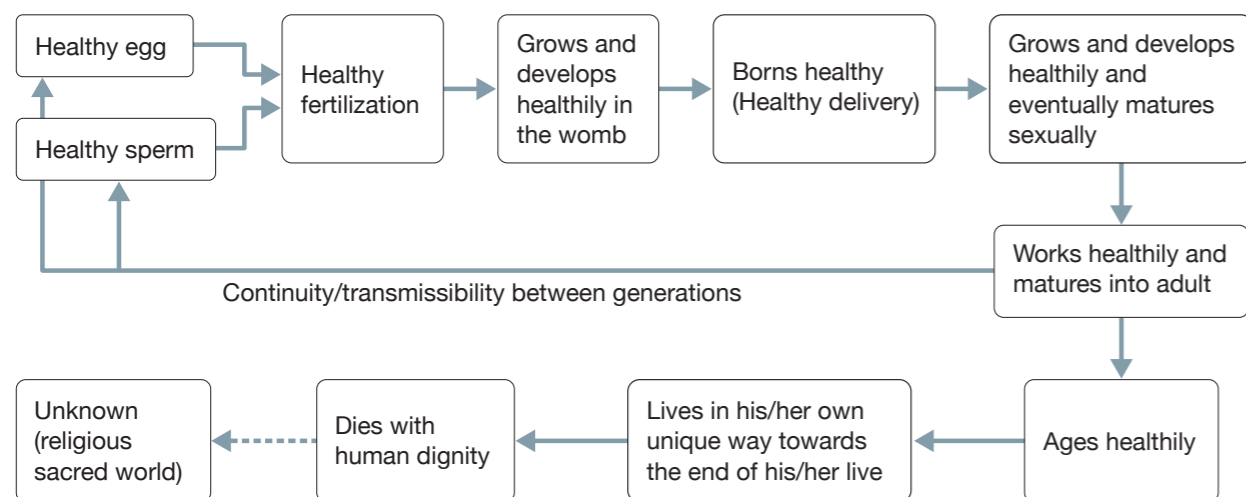


Figure 0.1 Human life cycle and health

life, and eventually have a family. A healthy man and healthy woman produce healthy sperm and healthy eggs in their respective reproductive organs, and pass on the life information in their DNA to the next generation. Life repeats this cycle.

When people reach maturity and healthy adulthood, they undergo the aging process according to the laws of human life. They age healthily towards the end of their lives. They live healthily in their own unique way in their last days, and finally die with human dignity. The afterlife is an unknown world. There is a sacred world that differs with each religion. Some may not believe in the existence of such a world.

### 2. Significance of learning and teaching school health

If people could live in perfect “health,” as shown in this diagram, it would be a miracle and this is practically impossible. The pursuit of perfect health without considering the limitations of human beings and society leads to the concept of eugenics, which may result in the social exclusion of all but those who can be considered “healthy.” Since there is no such thing as a perfect human being, we must not fall into the trap of healthism (the pursuit of health as the most valuable attribute).

At some point in the life cycle, everybody experiences situations, environments, and conditions that adversely affect their health, as well as suffers health challenges such as illness, injury, disability, and ill-health to some extent. No matter how early or late, there is no escaping the fate of being human, or death. In other words, while the timing of death may be unequal, we are all equal in the sense that none of us can escape death.

However, most people want to live as long as possible in good health, and lead as abundant and happy a life as possible. What can education and schools do to achieve this? School health is an initiative that brings together teachers and staff, families and relatives, and community members to work together to realize the wish to live a healthy life, by focusing on the health of school-aged children. The role of “perfect health” as defined by WHO (see Chapter 1) can be seen as a guide to how we should survive and lead our daily lives, just as the ancients sailed across the sea at night toward their destination by following the North Star and the Southern Cross. The destination may be a feasible “better health” that takes into account the limitations of human beings and society.

Given the **diversities of the physical body, development, sexuality, and socioculture**, it is important to note that “health” is not a single event, but a spectrum that comprises various degrees of health, and a concept with diverse dimensions of value. Depending on the culture, history, religion, ethnicity, gender, etc., of a country, society, and region, various views of health can exist.

In today’s society, it is necessary to teach health based on the knowledge that has accumulated through scientific methods, and simultaneously consider these diversified ways of thinking about health. Accordingly, to live a healthy life means to combine rich wisdom about health rooted in our experiences and daily life (for examples, self-care, self-medication, self-protection, and herbal medicine) with accurate scientific knowledge about health, and to practice and confirm it in our daily lives, and to improve our lives and ways of life by ourselves. At times, it is necessary to seek assistance from the community and others in order to live a healthy life.

Nevertheless, the scope of what humans know about the **mysteries surrounding health** is limited. Therefore, the attitude of being conscious of our ignorance and modestly putting into practice the wisdom and knowledge of health in our daily lives is the mindset that allows us to think of health as our own, and is the stance required of those who study and teach school health.

This textbook discusses the contents of the newly introduced elementary school health course. Specifically, it comprises 16 chapters that university students should study to become teachers qualified to learn and teach school health. These 16 chapters contain the essence of school health, which will not only be useful for you when you become a teacher, but will also help you to understand your own health, the health of your family and friends, and the health of the people of Cambodia. It is important that you approach the contents of each chapter as your own experience and something to reflect on, and study them as a personal matter, not that of others. You can work on the EXERCISE at the end of each chapter and discuss it in class to deepen your learning.

**Column: Diseases, disabilities, and the concept of eugenics**

**Eugenics** is a field of academic study that believes that there are two types of human beings: those with good biological characteristics and those without. It seeks to improve the quality of human beings by retaining those with superior genetic characteristics and eliminating those with inferior genetic factors. Against the background of this discipline, the concept of eugenics is the belief that there are people with qualities worthy of living and those without. It assigns superiority and inferiority to human lives. The most significant criteria used to determine superiority and inferiority, in the past and present, are disabilities, diseases, race/ethnicity, and age.

### 3. Characteristics of health as a school subject

To teach and learn health in schools, one should comprehensively understand human health in relation to the body, psychology, behavior, social environment, and natural environment, and apply what has been learned to daily lives. In particular, teaching and learning about health in schools means conveying scientific knowledge about health and right living skills to students to help them practice healthy living.

The key to achieving this is communication between those who teach and those who learn (including teaching methods, i.e., how to teach health). In fact, there are two worlds: the one where teachers belong and the other where students, children, and the general public live. The knowledge and common sense about health differ between these two worlds. The languages being used are also different.

The two worlds of life, of course, overlap. Teachers are familiar with both worlds: the one using professional and scientific knowledge and the other one depending on everyday common and traditional wisdom. They play a vital role in bridging the two (**Figure 0.2**). This role, in other words, is that of a **health education-communicator**.

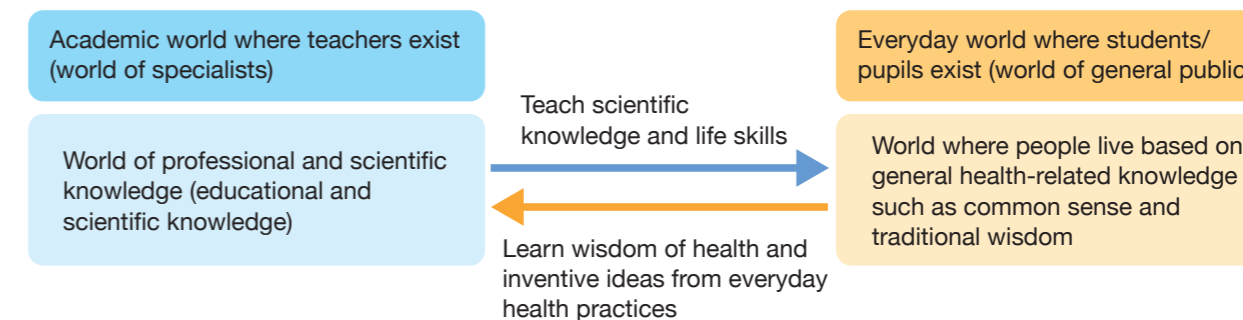
In health education, it is essential to convey specialized knowledge to students, children, and the general public in an easy-to-understand manner that can help them change their behavior and thinking. However, this by itself will only result in teachers unilaterally imposing their knowledge on students and

pupils. Since scientific health knowledge is universal, it may not necessarily correspond to each person's individual health, lifestyle, or environment (for example, consider traditional food cultures and how ingredients are procured in a region). This is why the wisdom of health that exists in our daily lives is so valuable. It may actually serve practical purposes because it is an accumulation of experiences that are appropriate to each person's physical and personality characteristics, local lifestyle, and living environment. Of course, there are some practices that need to be changed from the SDGs perspective, including Cambodia's traditional sexual norms and childbirth culture, as well as child marriage and female genital mutilation seen around the world ([see Chapter 11](#)).

Therefore, health education requires you to well understand and respect the traditions, customs, wisdom, and ideas of the local communities, as well as to communicate by translating scientific knowledge in a way that is easy to understand and practice in daily lives. This may involve using scientific, technical terms, or translating technical terms into the language used in daily life, requiring flexibility to accommodate the circumstances.

The health education in Cambodia should be aimed at exploring a healthy way of life that benefits from the health and welfare systems and services that will be domestically developed in the future, and from a body of scientific knowledge of health and medicine emerging around the world, while preserving as much as possible the culture and ecology of living in the regions where economic development will take place.

In this way, health education in school seeks to cultivate the ability of students and children to live healthily, as well as to create a society and environment in which everyone in the community can live healthier life.



**Figure 0.2** Two-way health education communication in school health

### 4. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and school health

The final topic is the connection between **SDGs** and school health. SDGs are the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set out at the United Nation (UN) Summit in 2015, as goals or challenges to achieve a sustainable and better world by 2030. In essence, the SDGs are a set of goals that the entire world should work towards, regardless of economic or development level, in order for humanity to survive and prosper sustainably on this planet. Of course, Cambodia is also trying to address

# Health

the SDGs.<sup>1</sup>

The SDGs consist of 17 goals and 169 targets under these goals. The 17 goals are as follows:

- Goal 1: End **poverty** in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2: End **hunger**, achieve **food security** and improved **nutrition** and promote **sustainable agriculture**
- Goal 3: Ensure **healthy lives** and promote **well-being** for all at all ages
- Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable **quality education** and promote **lifelong learning** opportunities for all
- Goal 5: Achieve **gender equality** and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of **water and sanitation** for all
- Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern **energy** for all
- Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable **economic growth**, full and productive employment, and **decent work** for all
- Goal 9: Build resilient **infrastructure**, promote inclusive and sustainable **industrialization**, and foster innovation
- Goal 10: Reduce **inequality** within and among countries
- Goal 11: Make **cities and human settlements inclusive, safe**, resilient, and sustainable
- Goal 12: Ensure sustainable **consumption and production** patterns
- Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat **climate change** and its impacts
- Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the **oceans, seas, and marine resources** for sustainable development
- Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of **terrestrial ecosystems**, sustainably manage **forests**, combat **desertification**, and halt and reverse **land degradation** and halt **biodiversity loss**
- Goal 16: Promote **peaceful and inclusive societies** for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the **global partnership for sustainable development**

The terms in bold in the list of 17 goals are those that are discussed in this textbook in relation to health and well-being, safety, and hygiene. They show that school health is not just about health education in schools, but that it plays a vital role in working towards the SDGs and can make a significant contribution to Cambodian society. Furthermore, as stated in the Cambodian School Health Policy (2016, 2019)<sup>2,3</sup>, university students, pupils, and teachers who have studied school health are expected to become human resources who can contribute to a Cambodian society that grows sustainably and is peaceful and healthy.

## References

- 1 Cambodia Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.csdgs.org/km/>
- 2 Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. SCHOOL HEALTH POLICY. 2006.
- 3 Royal Government of Cambodia. National Policy on School Health. 2019.

## Learning objectives

You will be able to gain proper understanding and explain:

- The definition and aspects of health.
- The importance and benefits of health education programs in schools.
- The significance of implementing school health activities.
- School health policies and initiatives adopted in Cambodia.

This chapter provides basic knowledge necessary to understand human health and school health initiatives. First, we introduce basic health concepts and a few new ideas, and underscore that health is a basic human right. Next, we explain the concept of child health based on the characteristics of child development. We also outline the global trend towards health promotion and building healthy societies, and describe the importance of school health initiatives, their four pillars, and school health policy in Cambodia.

## 1. Aspects of health

“Health” is a term that encompasses the physical, mental, psychological, and social state of human beings in a single word.

The constitution of the **World Health Organization** (WHO), signed by representatives of 61 nations in 1946, describes the most desirable and ideal conditions for health with the following statement: **“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”**<sup>1</sup> The WHO Constitution also declares that “enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.”<sup>1</sup> This right must be guaranteed regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, political belief, or socioeconomic status.<sup>1</sup>

The WHO Constitution warns that inequalities exist in the areas of health promotion and infectious disease control, depending on respective levels of socioeconomic development among nations. Such conditions are described as a threat shared worldwide, not just among developing nations.<sup>1</sup>

More recently, global climate change as well as the spread of lifestyle-related diseases accompanying changes in people’s ways of life and the rise in average human life expectancy have had a conspicuous impact, prompting new ideas about health. One such example is to seek lifestyles that are in harmony with the environment and ecosystem. For instance, the **Ecohealth** concept is rooted in awareness that human beings are also part of the ecosystem (**Figure 1.1**). This approach to human health stresses the importance of maintaining a balance among the environment, the ecosystem, socioeconomic development, peoples’ livelihoods, production activities, and lifestyles.<sup>2</sup>