

## Activities

### **Nutrition as health promoter**

Overweight is the most common food-related health problem among children and adolescents in Germany. Every fifth child and every third adolescent in Germany is overweight; seven to eight per cent are even severely overweight. A multi-annual campaign launched in 2003 - [www.kinder-leicht.net](http://www.kinder-leicht.net) - is searching for ways to prevent overweight in children in cooperation with representatives of parents, schools, day care centres, health-sector multipliers, sports clubs, the sciences, the food industry, food retailers and the media.

### **Protection against radiation**

Numerous projects are being carried out to protect children and adolescents from UV radiation, high-frequency electromagnetic radiation (mobile phones) and natural radioactivity (radon). By providing information on the use of cell phones and sunbathing, the Action Programme seeks to encourage kids to take precautions with regard to their health.

### **Learning in a healthy, clean-air environment**

In school buildings, children and adolescents can be exposed to pollutants from building materials, furniture and equipment. Elevated carbon dioxide concentrations are frequently found in cases of insufficient ventilation. A guide on clean air in school buildings contains factual information and gives advice on how students can be protected from health risks due to indoor air pollution.

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## Children, Environment and Health

### **Children's Health Network**

Non-governmental organisations are making an important contribution to health-related environment protection. The Action Programme has supported the establishment of the Children's Health Network, a broad coalition of children's and youth organisations, environmental associations, parent initiatives and enviro-medical associations. Among its current activities is the development of a guide for paediatricians.

### **Local activities**

Five model projects in different German towns are exploring ways to achieve a healthy residential environment for children and adolescents.

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For further information on the Action Programme Environment and Health, visit the APUG website at [www.apug.de](http://www.apug.de) or contact the APUG-Secretariat directly.



**Action Programme  
Environment and Health  
Germany**

**Children and Adolescents**  
(Selected activities)



**Umwelt  
Bundes  
Amt**  
Für Mensch und Umwelt



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## The Action Programme

Children and adolescents are not little adults. They react to environmental influences in part differently from adults and are less able to avoid some exposure situations. The behaviour patterns of small children, such as frequent hand-to-mouth contact, crawling, playing on the floor or digging in sand, favour the uptake of pollutants. With exposure to the same pollutant concentration, children are able to absorb higher amounts of pollutants in relation to their body weight than adults.

In recent years, the spectrum of diseases among children and adolescents has changed. In industrialized countries infectious diseases have fallen sharply. The problem of chronic diseases - such as asthma and allergies - however, has increased. More and more children are overweight and suffer from ensuing illnesses due to a lack of exercise, an improper diet and unhealthy eating habits. Noise, stress and a changed living environment are adding to the strain on children and adolescents.

**Children and adolescents require adequate protection against health impairment caused by environmental factors!**

**The Action Programme Environment and Health helps to provide it.**

In June 1999, Germany's Federal Environment Ministry and Federal Health Ministry presented their joint **Action Programme Environment and Health** (German acronym: APUG) to the public. The Federal Consumer Protection Ministry joined the Programme in autumn of 2002.

## Activities

### [www.kinderwelt.org](http://www.kinderwelt.org)

This Internet website addresses children and adolescents to inform them about noise, radiation, allergies, the skin, indoor air, fitness and nutrition. In addition to games there is a newsletter.

### **Environmental stresses on children**

How strong are children exposed to environmental stresses? For the first time, representative data of human body concentrations of pollutants (human biomonitoring) as well as pollution levels in the domestic environment and domestic drinking water (indoor monitoring) are being collected for children. These data are gathered in the German Environmental Survey for Children, a module of the National Health Interview and Examination Survey for Children and Adolescents ([www.kiggs.de](http://www.kiggs.de)). The aim is to analyse the impact of the environment on the health of children and adolescents in Germany. Additionally the impact of environmental stresses on respiratory allergies, irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, contact allergies of the skin, and the impact of noise on hearing and stress examines are analysed.

### **Vulnerability of children to pollutants**

How do children cope with the contaminants they absorb? Who is more vulnerable to chemical substances - children or adults? It is not possible to give a definite answer to this question. Newborns excrete contaminants more slowly than adults, whereas older children excrete them more quickly. Since the organism of children and adolescents is still growing and not fully developed, their organs react differently to environmental factors. The different sensitivity to toxins has to be taken into account when setting threshold and guide

The Action Programme Environment and Health aims to strengthen the links between environmental and health protection in order to offer better protection of human health against adverse environmental impacts. It emphasises the protection of children and adolescents.

## Children, Environment and Health

values. Several projects are studying environmental health risks to children.

### **Health risks caused by noise**

More and more children and adolescents are suffering from hearing loss due to loud music, noisy toys or fireworks. Environmental noise such as from traffic, industry, neighbours or recreational activities can be a stress factor and involves health risks. Current projects will provide more groundwork for information about noise-induced risks and changes in behaviour among children and adolescents.

### **Education in sustainable mobility in schools**

Habits are formed during childhood. More and more parents are driving their children to school, to sport facilities, to friends. Vehicle exhaust, noise, accident hazards and a lack of exercise are the most well-known adverse impacts of road traffic. The Action Programme Environment and Health aims to integrate environmental and exercise aspects into mobility education and to encourage independent and safe movement of children and adolescents by foot, bicycle and public transport.

### **Breast milk analyses**

Breast milk is the best food for infants. It may, however, contain undesirable chemicals that originate from the environment. This is why breast milk is regularly analysed for residues.

The Action Programme Environment and Health is supported by the superior federal authorities Federal Office for Radiation Protection, Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, Robert Koch-Institute and Federal Environmental Agency. The APUG-Secretariat is based at the Federal Environmental Agency.