



**hbsc**  
HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN  
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN  
SCOTLAND



## About the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC)

HBSC is a World Health Organisation (WHO) cross-national study which aims to increase our understanding of young people's health and wellbeing, health behaviours and social context. HBSC monitors the health and health behaviour of young people over time and across countries as well as the wider context in which they live. This includes important aspects such as family and peer relationships, the school experience and the socio-economic environment in which they are growing up. This helps us to understand better what factors shape and influence health and health behaviours.

The first study was conducted in Scotland in 1990 and it has been repeated every 4 years since then, providing a unique insight into how health and health behaviours have changed over the last 30+ years. HBSC involves 50 countries across Europe and North America and, therefore, allows us to see how young people in Scotland are doing compared with young people in other countries.

The 2026 survey is funded by Public Health Scotland and conducted by Researchers in the School of Health and Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow.

### Survey population

Data are collected through school-based surveys, using an international standard questionnaire. The target population of the study is young people attending school, aged 11 (P7), 13 (S2) and 15 (S4) years. In each participating country a sample of around 6000 young people complete the survey.

## 2026 survey topics

In addition to monitoring long-term trends, the 2026 survey will provide invaluable information on

- Mental wellbeing
- Sleeping habits
- Electronic media use
- Eating habits
- Physical activity and leisure time
- Alcohol and tobacco/e-cigarette use
- Bullying
- Sexual health (S4 pupils only)
- School experience
- Relationships with friends and family



## Report outputs from 2022 survey

Visit the [HBSC website](#) to read the 2022 Scotland national results, showing key findings and trends over time by gender, age and socioeconomic status.

Based on the 2022 survey results, we also produced 3 short research briefings that can be used as an educational resource within the classroom setting. These briefings can also be viewed on our website:

[Young people's experiences of bullying and cyberbullying in Scotland](#)

[Anxiety among young people in Scotland](#)

[Trends in young people's substance use in Scotland](#)

## Who uses the data?

The data produced by HBSC are used to provide evidence to inform the development of policies and programmes tailored to the needs of young people at local, national and international levels. Key users include:

Scottish Government

Public Health Scotland

Local Authorities and Health Boards

Schools

Academics

Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network (SHINE)

Third sector organisations

International organisations e.g. WHO, UNICEF, OECD

## What have we learnt from 30 years of HBSC in Scotland?



Substantial reductions in alcohol and tobacco use but increases in e-cigarette use



Improvements in eating habits, e.g. decline in consumption of chips and soft drinks



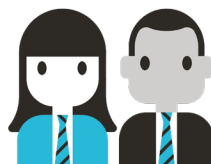
Declines in confidence, happiness and mental wellbeing



High levels of problematic social media use in girls compared to other countries



Increases in sleep difficulties



Increasing levels of schoolwork pressure

## What our data users say

*"Your research is important for a number of different reasons...it provides us with a barometer against which we can broadly measure the success of policies which aim to improve the health and well-being of Scotland's young people. It also shows us where the challenges remain".*

Scottish Minister for Children and Young People 2011-2016, from the HSBC 30th Annual Conference, Summary Report

*"A particular strength of the HBSC study is its longevity, with surveys conducted every four years in Scotland since 1990. This provides unparalleled insight into trends in young people's health and its determinants, which is essential as we experience cultural, economic and technological changes in our society."*

Public Health Scotland

## What are the data used for?

In 2024, data from the HBSC Scotland survey have been used by Scottish Directors of Public Health and Public Health Scotland in a position statement on Stopping tobacco smoking and youth vaping. Scottish Government used HBSC data to measure progress of the Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland and provided much of the evidence around health and wellbeing of adolescents for their review of poverty and inequalities; Life Chances of Young People in Scotland Evidence Review. HBSC data contributed to the Scottish Government Pregnancy and Parenthood in Young People's Strategy 2016-2026, and is the only source of internationally comparable data on adolescent sexual health in Scotland. HBSC Scotland data is available in the World Health Organisation data gateway, where the health and wellbeing of Scotland's young people can be compared to those in countries across Europe. Data from Scotland and other European countries are used by UNICEF in their flagship 'State of the World's Children' reports, and several of their 'Report Card' series highlighting inequalities in young people's wellbeing between rich countries.

## Further information

If you would like to find out more about HBSC please visit:

[HBSC Scotland](#)

[HBSC International](#)

You can also [contact us by email](#)



University  
of Glasgow

School of Health  
& Wellbeing