



HBSC Scotland Survey 2026

Frequently asked questions for parents

What is the HBSC study?

The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study is a cross-national study of adolescent health and wellbeing conducted in partnership with the World Health Organisation. It is conducted in 50 countries and regions across Europe and North America, including Scotland.

What is the aim of the study?

The study aims to better understand the health and wellbeing of young people aged 11, 13 and 15 years, and to monitor changes in health and wellbeing over time. The information collected is used to inform national and international policies and programmes to improve young people's health. The international perspective also allows us to see how young people in Scotland are doing compared with those in other countries in Europe and North America.

How often does HBSC take place?

The HBSC survey takes place every 4 years. Scotland joined the study in 1990 and the 2026 survey will be the 10th survey round conducted in Scotland.

Who runs the HBSC Scotland study?

HBSC Scotland is run by a research team at the University of Glasgow. The study is funded by Public Health Scotland and the team work in collaboration with the World Health Organisation as part of the international study.

Does this study have ethical approval?

Yes, the 2026 HBSC Scotland survey has been approved by The College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow (Application number 200240482).

Who is taking part?

The research team have approached Directors of Education in all 32 local authorities to seek permission to recruit schools within their local authority. In LAs where permission is granted, primary and secondary schools are randomly selected to take part. In 2026, the survey will



involve around 6000 pupils from across Scotland in P7, S2 and S4 as well as young people from over 50 countries in Europe and North America.

What types of questions does the survey include?

The HBSC questionnaire includes questions about health and health behaviours, such as eating habits, physical activity, online behaviour, social media use and gaming, sleep, alcohol and tobacco use, emotional wellbeing, school life, and relationships with family and friends. For S4 pupils only there are a few questions about cannabis use and sexual health.

Pupils are asked to provide their postcode so that we can determine the type of area in which young people live e.g. city, small town or rural area. This is important in order to understand the effects of geographic location and the neighbourhood environment on young people's health. Postcode data are then deleted once they have been replaced by alternative indicators of the local area.

Pupils are asked to provide their date of birth so that we can calculate age. Date of birth data is then deleted.

All questions are optional. Pupils can choose which questions they want to answer. They do not need to answer all questions in the questionnaire. If there is a question they do not want to answer, they can move on to the next question.

The survey takes around 30 -40 minutes to complete, and children will be asked to complete it on their own during class time.

All countries which participate in HBSC share a common set of core questions which have been scientifically validated and used extensively with school-aged children. National teams can also choose to include additional questions of national interest.

The questionnaire has been tested with the relevant age groups and the final set of questions has been agreed by the HBSC Scotland Steering Group.

Is this survey the same as the Health and Wellbeing Census?

No, HBSC is completely separate from the Health and Wellbeing Census. The last cycle of HBSC ran in 2022, which coincided with the Scottish Government Health and Wellbeing Census in schools, so there may be some confusion. HBSC is a long-standing international study, which has been running in Scotland for the last 30 years. It is led by a research team at Glasgow University and the findings are used for research purposes as well as by national governments and international agencies to inform their work.



Is participation compulsory?

No. It is up to Local Authority Directors of Education, individual schools and ultimately individual pupils and their parent/carers to decide if they want to take part or not. Pupils also have the option to opt out on the day on the survey.

What do I do if I don't want my child to take part?

If your child is invited to take part, you will receive an information sheet about the study at least 2 weeks before the study takes place. Parents can then decide if they would like their child to take part in the survey. If they do not want their child to take part, they are asked to sign and return an opt-out consent form to the school. They can also phone or email the school to let them know they do not wish their child to participate.

How will the survey be administered?

The survey will be administered online, during one class period. Pupils will need access to an electronic device compatible with the link, such as a tablet, PC, laptop or mobile phone. The school will arrange this. Pupil data will be collected using a University approved third party survey platform provided by Qualtrics.

Will the survey disrupt my child's school schedule or learning?

We ask teachers to conduct the survey during PSE classes to minimise disruption to pupils learning and the survey should typically take one class period to complete.

What happens to the survey data?

Researchers from the HBS Scotland team collect, store and process all personal information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Responses are stored on secure servers at the University of Glasgow and analysed by researchers in the HBSG Scotland team. In line with University of Glasgow policy, the data will be stored for a minimum of 10 years. After this period, further retention may be agreed or the data will be securely destroyed in accordance with the relevant standard procedures.

A Scottish National report is produced after each survey round to present the latest findings and long-term trends in the health and wellbeing of young people across Scotland. You can view a copy of our 2022 National report here: [National report](#)

Participating schools also receive a school-level report, which combines the results from all the pupils who completed the survey in the school. This can be used to help inform planning for health and wellbeing activities. No individual pupil can be identified from this report.



As part of the international HBSC study, a pseudonymised dataset is sent to the HBSC Data Management Centre at the University of Bergen. A pseudonymised dataset is one where all identifiable information (e.g. school name) has been removed and saved separately so that individual participants cannot be identified. International data are used to produce HBSC International Reports which are published by the World Health Organisation. Previous international reports are available at <https://hbsc.org/publications/reports/>.

An anonymised dataset (a dataset with no identifying information about your child) may be made available to other trusted researchers for further research and teaching. The anonymised dataset will also be deposited in a secure place (repository) such as the UK Data Archive or the University of Glasgow Enlighten: Research Data repository.

Who will see the results?

Results are published in the form of national reports and academic papers. These are available to policymakers, practitioners, schools, researchers and the public. Only grouped findings are shared. No school or individual can be identified.

How are young people's rights protected?

The HBSC Scotland team have taken strict measures to ensure your child's rights and autonomy have been protected. Some specific examples include:

- Participation is completely voluntary. Parents can withdraw their child and, your child can choose not to take part on the day.
- Before pupils start the survey they are asked to select one of the following options:
 - ☐ Yes, I am happy to take part in the survey
 - ☐ No, I do not want to take part in the survey
- Pupils do not have to answer all the questions. If there are any questions they do not want to answer, that's fine, they can leave them blank.
- Pupil answers will be saved as they go through the questionnaire. If they change their mind once they have answered a question, they can use the 'back' button at the bottom of the page to go back to check, change or remove their answers.
- Closing the survey at any time will save all the answers they have given so far. If they want to remove any answers before they leave, they can do this by using the 'back' and 'next' button and deleting their answers.



Will individual pupils be identifiable?

HBSC does not collect pupil names, Scottish Candidate Numbers or CHI numbers.

No individual pupils will be identifiable in any reports, presentations or other outputs produced by the research. Individual schools will receive a report for their school, but only if the number of participants in their school is large enough to ensure no individuals can be identified.

The data will be pseudonymised, that is, we will remove personal information from the working dataset such as date of birth and postcode and replace it with age and local area measures (e.g. urban/rurality) respectively.

How have parents and carers been engaged?

The research team at University of Glasgow have a long history of research and data collection with school pupils, and with parental engagement to support this work. The research team also coordinate the SHINE network, which engages with parents regularly. In advance of the 10th cycle of HBSC Scotland study, the researchers have met with CONNECT (formally the Scottish Parent Teacher Council) to support engagement with parents and carers.

What should I do if I have any further questions?

Please feel free to contact the research team using the following email address: shw-hbscscotland@glasgow.ac.uk