

DH announces key findings of annual health assessment of Student Health Service

The Department of Health (DH) today (January 3) announced the key findings of the annual health assessment service of the DH's Student Health Service (SHS) in the 2022/23 school year and appealed to primary and secondary school students to enrol for the annual health assessment service in the 2023/24 school year.

The DH's SHS provides free annual health assessment service for eligible primary and secondary school students with the aim of identifying students with health problems at an early stage for timely advice and intervention. Students were provided with a series of health services designed to cater for their health needs at various stages of their development, including physical examinations; screenings for health problems related to growth, nutrition, vision, hearing, scoliosis, psychosocial health and behaviour; individual counselling; health education and vaccination. Students found to have health problems will be referred to Special Assessment Centre (SAC) under the Student Health Service, specialist clinics of the Hospital Authority, or other appropriate organisations for further assessment or management.

A total of 233 000 primary students and 97 000 secondary students attended the Student Health Service Centres (SHSCs) for annual health assessment services in the 2022/23 school year. The main findings requiring attention are summarised in the ensuing paragraphs.

The annual health assessment revealed a deterioration of students' vision in recent years, especially among lower grade primary students. The percentage of Primary One students who wore corrective lenses remained stable at 11 per cent from the 2015/16 school year to 2019/20, but increased to 15 per cent in 2020/21 and remained level till 2022/23. The overall percentage of primary and secondary school students who required a referral to the optometry service of the SHS for further visual assessment, including those who failed the preliminary visual acuity test, also increased from 9.4 per cent in 2018/19 to 16.7 per cent in 2020/21, followed by a slight drop to 13 per cent in 2022/23.

The data also revealed that the detection rates of being overweight (including obesity) among primary and secondary school students remained elevated in 2022/23. Prior to the COVID-19 epidemic, the rates among the two groups of students were about 17.4 per cent and 19.9 per cent respectively for the 2018/19 school year. The detection rates increased to 20.6 per cent and 22.1 per cent in 2021/22 and slightly dropped to 19.5 per cent and 20.5 per cent respectively in 2022/23. During the COVID-19 epidemic, class suspension, online classes, decreased outdoor physical activity, together with increased screen time, all imposed higher risks of overweight/obesity

and deteriorated vision. To prevent childhood and adolescent obesity developing into a lifelong threat to health, the SHS encourages students to develop healthy living and eating habits by engaging in at least one hour of a moderate-to-vigorous intensity of physical activity daily and maintaining a healthy balanced diet. For students who require more support on weight management, dietitians of the SACs also provide individualised dietary advice to students upon referral of the SHSCs.

The health assessment of the SHSCs also revealed that the percentage of students requiring a referral to the SAC, specialist clinics or other organisations for psychosocial and behavioural problems had increased from 1.1 per cent in the 2018/19 school year to 1.8 per cent in 2022/23. The self-administered questionnaire collected from students attending the SHSCs in the 2022/23 school year found that 2.8 per cent and 1.3 per cent of all students had planned to commit suicide or attempted suicide in the past 12 months respectively, with a higher percentage among secondary students (3.7 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively). Healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses, clinical psychologists in the SHSCs and SACs have paid additional attention to students' emotions and mental health needs, and provided individual health counselling and advice to students. In the 2022/23 school year, the Adolescent Health Programme team of the SHS visited 279 secondary schools in the form of an outreaching service to promote psychosocial and mental well-being of students, helping them to build basic life skills and resilience to life stresses. Information and tips on psychosocial and mental health have been uploaded to the SHS website for students, parents and teachers' reference. Furthermore, the Government has set up the 18111 – Mental Health Support Hotline to provide one-stop, round-the-clock support for people with mental health needs, rendering them immediate mental health support and referral services. In addition, the Government has also implemented the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism to ensure early identification of and support for students at high risk and provide timely assistance and seek professional counselling or treatment services for them.

A spokesman for the DH said that the SHS aims to safeguard both the physical and psychological health of students through health promotion and disease prevention services, enabling them to gain the maximum benefit from the education system and develop their full potential. While some student annual health assessment services were earlier suspended due to the COVID-19 epidemic, 12 SHSCs have resumed annual health assessment services for all grades of primary and secondary students during the school year 2023/24. The spokesman again urged students to enrol in the annual health assessment service.

Enrolment is now open for the annual health assessment service of the 2023/24 school year. Students who have not yet enrolled are encouraged to enrol through their school or enrol directly with the SHSCs. The enrolment form and relevant information are available at the [SHS web page](#).

For latest information on the SHS, please visit www.studenthealth.gov.hk/eindex.html.