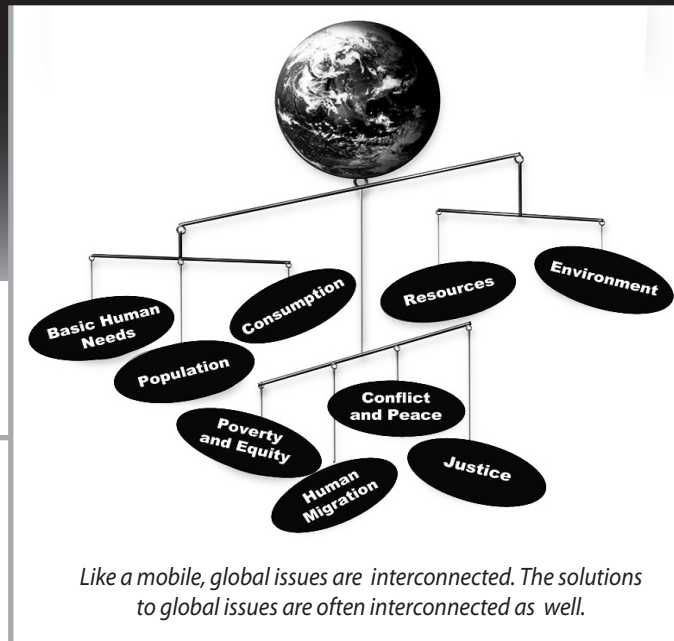


Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions

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Join us on Wednesdays and Fridays for Skills for Everyday Living, a series that goes beyond the classroom to prepare students for the many challenges of the real world. Our current topic is **Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions**, developed by *Facing the Future*. Series ends June 13.



What Is Good Health, Anyway?

What does good health mean to you? Many people think of health as the absence of illness. A broader definition of health is provided by the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO defines health as complete physical, mental and social well-being.

Health is a global concern connected to many other global issues such as poverty, the environment and education. Let's examine some interconnections and ways you can improve health and well-being for yourself and others.

Economic Equality: A Needed Booster Shot?

One issue connected with health is economic inequality. Economic inequality, sometimes called the rich-poor gap, refers to the difference between income levels of very poor and very wealthy people. Some research indicates that in wealthier countries there is a connection between economic inequality and the population's health.

In 2005, the United States ranked 30th in life expectancy, despite spending more money on health care than any other country. Researchers at the Population Health Forum, an organization founded at the University of Washington, believe that one major reason is our nation's large rich-poor gap. All of the 29 countries that have longer life expectancies also have greater economic equality among their citizens.

This raises some questions about the link between economic equality and physical health. Why do you think a smaller gap between rich and poor citizens might be related to better health in some countries?

How can we improve the well-being of our poorest citizens? While there are no easy answers, some possible strategies include increasing child care and educational services for people with low incomes.

Asthma and African Dust

Asthma is the most common chronic childhood illness in the U.S. According to the American Lung Association, 6.5 million children under 18 have asthma. Asthma is a lung condition that can make it difficult to breathe; in severe cases it can lead to death. Asthma attacks can be caused by many things, including allergens like pollen from trees and irritants like cigarette smoke and air pollution.

What does climate change have to do with asthma? This may seem like a strange question, but the answer may be even more surprising! Northern African soils are becoming drier and drier. This is due to several reasons, including drought, the drying of Lake Chad, and overgrazing — all of which are intensified by climate change.

Much of the dust from Africa is carried by winds across the Atlantic Ocean to Caribbean islands such as Trinidad and Barbados. Asthma rates on these two islands are the highest in the world, and dust from Africa is thought to be one reason. Dust from Africa has also reached Florida, where asthma rates have increased significantly over the last two decades.¹ This is a dramatic example of the impact that worldwide environmental and climate conditions can have on human health.

Fortunately, we can improve this situation, since we already know some steps we can take to reduce climate change. Can you recall some of the actions you've read about in this series? *Here are a few reminders:*

- Reduce your reliance on fossil fuels, which release greenhouse gases that warm the earth. You can do this by unplugging electronics when you are not using them and traveling by bus or bike instead of by car.

- Buy items produced close to your home. This reduces the fossil fuels and air pollution used to transport items from far away.
- Recycle and buy recycled products. Recycled products such as aluminum cans and paper require less energy (and therefore less fossil fuel) to produce.

Educate Yourself

You may never have thought about how education impacts your overall health. As it turns out, education has everything to do with health! There are examples all over the world of how educating women leads to better health of their children and families. Some researchers have also found that people who stay in school longer enjoy longer lives and better health during old age than people with less education.² Why do you think you might enjoy better health if you stay in school?

Improve your health and the health of others by learning more about health issues and solutions. For example, learning the signs of mental illness (see the National Association on Mental Illness: www.nami.org) could help you, a friend or a family member. Also, practicing good hygiene habits (see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov) could help you and others around you avoid illness.

What do you already know about good health habits, and what would you like to learn more about? Look through today's newspaper to see what else you can discover.

¹ Laurie J. Schmidt, "When the Dust Settles," *NASA Earth Science Enterprise Data and Services: Features*, May 18, 2001. <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Study/Dust/>.

² Gina Kolata, "A Surprising Secret to a Long Life: Stay in School," *The New York Times*, January 3, 2007.

Activity

- ❖ In addition to what organizations are doing to address world health issues, there are actions you can take for a healthy life. Determine at least five factors that contribute to your physical and mental health. Set goals for these five factors in your life.

Take Action!

- ❖ Be a health ambassador: Learn and teach other students about good health habits. Visit Safe Kids Worldwide, www.safekids.org, the Washington State Department of Health, www.doh.wa.gov, and the CDC, www.cdc.gov for health and safety information. Then create an awareness campaign using posters, public service announcements, articles for your school newspaper, or pamphlets.