

Group suggests pushing age of adolescence to 24

January 22 2018, by Bob Yirka



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A small group of researchers with the Royal Children's Hospital in Australia is suggesting that it might be time to change the span of years that define adolescence—from the current 10 to 19 to a proposed 10 to

24 years of age. In their paper published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, the group offers arguments for their suggestion and the benefits they believe would come about by doing so.

Adolescence has traditionally been defined as the period between childhood and adulthood—from puberty until the attainment of an adult role in society. Though it is not normally legally tied to rights or entitlements, it has served as a guide for those who make policy. In the U.S. and Britain, for example, the age of 18 is considered the age of consent at which people are allowed to make choices about their bodies and their role in society, and are also allowed to vote and serve in the military. In their paper, the researchers suggest that due to both physical and societal changes, it might be time to consider pushing the end of adolescence forward a few years.

Adolescence has already been pushed lower, they note. Young boys and girls develop earlier than their parents and grandparents—many girls begin menstruating, the team notes, at around 10 years of age. The norm used to be age 14. New research, they also note, shows that the [adolescent brain](#) does not stop developing until a person is well into their 20s—and many do not develop [wisdom teeth](#) until age 25.

And, the team notes, society has changed, too. In the U.K., the average age of marriage has been climbing, from the early 20s to the early 30s. And [young people](#) are leaving home later, too. In the U.K, young people on average do not leave home until they are 25 years old. Expectations by parents and others in society have also changed—many parents now expect their children to live at home longer, which has led to the realization that some policies have to change. In the U.S. for example, parents have been pushing to force [insurance companies](#) to allow adults to keep their children on their policies longer.

Extending the age of adolescence, the group claims, would help in

framing laws meant to protect young people and also to help them on their path to adulthood.

More information: The age of adolescence, *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, DOI: [10.1016/S2352-4642\(18\)30022-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(18)30022-1) , [www.thelancet.com/journals/lan ... \(18\)30022-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lan ... (18)30022-1/fulltext)

Summary

Adolescence is the phase of life stretching between childhood and adulthood, and its definition has long posed a conundrum. Adolescence encompasses elements of biological growth and major social role transitions, both of which have changed in the past century. Earlier puberty has accelerated the onset of adolescence in nearly all populations, while understanding of continued growth has lifted its endpoint age well into the 20s. In parallel, delayed timing of role transitions, including completion of education, marriage, and parenthood, continue to shift popular perceptions of when adulthood begins. Arguably, the transition period from childhood to adulthood now occupies a greater portion of the life course than ever before at a time when unprecedented social forces, including marketing and digital media, are affecting health and wellbeing across these years. An expanded and more inclusive definition of adolescence is essential for developmentally appropriate framing of laws, social policies, and service systems. Rather than age 10–19 years, a definition of 10–24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth and popular understandings of this life phase and would facilitate extended investments across a broader range of settings.

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