

# Merck Consumer Health launches GEN100 in SA

Aimed at raising awareness of healthy living for school-aged children in South Africa, Merck recently announced the launch of its GEN100 programme.



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The programme is the second under the flagship WE100 initiative, Merck Consumer Health's business purpose that aims to help prepare society for a new era of humans living 100 healthy years.

Thanks to the increase in life expectancy since 1945, today's young people are more likely to live for 100 years. However, there is no guarantee that the next generation will live these extra years in a healthy state. In order to live longer, healthier lives, there needs to be improvements in overall well-being and, more importantly, children's health, so that the young people today will live healthier in their older age.

## Life expectancy in SA

In South Africa, life expectancy at birth for men and women is 59 and 66 years respectively due to various challenges such as HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases, malnutrition, and stroke. The earlier children are taught how to look after their health and equipped to make the right choices by informing them about healthy nutrition, hygiene, and exercise, the better their chances are for a long, healthy life.

“With an average life expectancy of less than 60 years and 30% of the population under 15 years, the potential impact of the GEN100 program in South Africa is something to be excited about. We are passionate about supporting generations in living healthily as we dream about a society where everyone could live longer and healthier lives,” said Uta Kemmerich-Keil, CEO, Merck Consumer Health.

GEN100 is specifically aimed at addressing health issues among South African school children. For example, in 2014, an estimated 41-million children under the age of five years were overweight or obese. Once considered a high-income country problem, being overweight and obese is now on the rise in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in urban settings.

## **Child obesity in Africa**

In Africa, the number of children who are overweight or obese has nearly doubled from 5.4-million in 1990 to 10.6-million in 2014. Childhood obesity is associated with a higher chance of obesity and disability in adulthood as well as premature death. It can cause cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, and some cancers if not interrupted.

Another salient health issue is the deficiency in micronutrients among the young population. Vitamin A deficiency for example is the leading cause of preventable blindness in children and increases the risk of disease and death from severe infections. This preventable deficiency is a public health problem in more than half of all countries, especially in Africa and South-East Asia, where young children are particularly affected.

## **Tackling misinformation**

Merck Consumer Health aims to address this challenge and enable a healthy way of ageing amongst South African school-aged children by tackling various challenges such as lack of resources, poor access to experts, and misinformation. The GEN100 “Healthy Choices” educational program will cover the topics of nutrition, obesity, diabetes, skincare, and exercise within the school curriculum.

In parallel, the programme will engage healthcare professionals in debates about the health gap and life expectancy to push the movement forward. Medical journals, data-driven visual aids, commissioned research, and support from key opinion leaders will all help strengthen the GEN100 program. GEN100 will use materials, exercises, and challenges to create changes in kids’ behaviour. The programme started as a pilot school activation on 8 May 2017, and will be launched in 40 schools throughout the rest of 2017.

For more information about the WE100 initiative, go to the Facebook page [www.facebook.com/WE100](https://www.facebook.com/WE100).

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