

PUBLIC HEALTH (POPULATION HEALTH)

PROMOTING HEALTHY PEOPLE AND HEALTHY PLACES



What is public health?

WE... Look beyond the health of a single person. We promote healthy communities.

How does public health make communities healthier?



WE...

- Monitor the population for diseases and risky behaviors that affect health. Then we help communities with higher levels of disease.
- Help make the environment around you safer and healthier.
- Promote policies that make the healthy choice the easy choice.
- Educate people on health topics to empower them to make safe and healthy choices.
- Work within communities to prevent disease before it starts, in partnership with health-care providers, local organizations and community members.



How is public health different from health care?

WE... Work to keep you from ending up in the doctor's office. We know the things that affect health happen mostly outside the doctor's office—in homes, schools, worksites and neighborhoods. Health starts where people live, work and play. So that's where we focus our work.



FACTORS THAT DETERMINE HEALTH:¹

Behavioral, socioeconomic, and environmental

60%

Genes

30%

Health care

10%



So what services does public health provide?

WE...

- Stop the spread of disease.
- Promote healthier environments.
- Help people get access to vaccines, family planning and disease screenings.
- Keep places like restaurants and child care centers safe.
- Help people get counseling to quit smoking or prevent health conditions like diabetes.
- Teach communities about healthy ways to live.

Examples of public health



- In the early 1900s, diseases caused by dirty drinking water were a major cause of death in the U.S., killing thousands of babies and young children. To deal with this problem, the health-care system treated patients for infections, while public health focused on getting communities access to clean drinking water. Studies have found that clean water was responsible for **cutting three-quarters of infant deaths and nearly two-thirds of childhood deaths** in the United States in the first 40 years of the 20th century—one of the most rapid health improvements in the nation's history.²
- Public health successfully lowered deaths from motor vehicle accidents over the last 100 years. Six times as many people drive today as in 1925. But **the annual death rate dropped from 1925 to 1997 by 90 percent**. How? Through public health policy changes to improve car safety and require seatbelt use, and through public education about drunk driving and seatbelt use.³
- In the 1960s, adult smoking rates in the U.S. were as high as 42.2 percent. While health-care providers worked with their patients to help them quit, public health worked on major policy changes like limits on cigarette advertising and bans on smoking in public places (like worksites, airplanes, restaurants, etc). Public health also taught the public about the harms of smoking. Now **U.S. smoking rates have dropped to 19.0 percent and in Colorado they are as low as 15.7 percent**.^{4,5,8}
- Tooth decay was a major cause of health-care costs in the early twentieth century. Fluoride can help prevent tooth decay. So **public health promoted the addition of fluoride in public water systems, which led to a 68 percent decline in tooth decay from the 1960s to the 1980s**. Researchers estimate that tooth decay prevention saved \$39 billion in dental-care costs in the U.S. from 1979-1989.^{6,7}
- Public health has successfully promoted food safety through the pasteurization of milk. Since the early 20th century, milk-borne illness in the United States has been sharply reduced. In 1938, milk-borne disease outbreaks represented 25 percent of all disease outbreaks due to infected foods and contaminated water. Today, **outbreaks due to pasteurized milk products are rare**.⁹

References

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