

## What is public health?

This page provides an explanation of what public health is. You can also find out more about the history of public health and the meaning of some useful public health terms.

# WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

Watch with subtitles [1]

There is no better time to join in the effort to promote and protect population health.

Public health is about helping people to stay healthy and protecting them from threats to their health.

Sometimes public health activities involve helping individuals, at other times they involve dealing with wider factors that have an impact on the health of many people (for example an age-group, an ethnic group, a locality, or a country).

While medicine and nursing are vital for helping and supporting people when they fall ill, work in public health contributes to reducing the causes of ill-health and improving people's health and wellbeing.

It does this through its work in four main 'domains':

- **health protection** -?protecting people's health (for example from environmental or biological threats, such as food poisoning or radiation)
- **health improvement** -?improving people's health (for example by helping people quit smoking or improving their living conditions)
- **healthcare public health** -?ensuring that our health services are the most effective, most efficient and equally accessible
- **academic public health** - spanning all the domains, academic public health aims to build the evidence on which all public health activity is based

?There is no better time to join in the effort to promote and protect population health. From growing rates of obesity to bio-terrorism and the advent of new diseases, public health issues appear regularly in the media.

## Want to find out more??

- Watch a series of short animations about the four 'domains' [2]
- Watch a video in which three public health professionals talk about public health [3]
- Read more about why you might consider working in public health [4]?
- Discover more about current achievements and priorities for public health [5]
- Find out more about roles within public health [6]
  
- History of public health in the UK

Expand / collapse

We tend to take things like having clean drinking water, safe sewage disposal and safer working conditions for granted in our day-to-day lives. However, it's only really been since the 19th century that governments have been more focused on improving health and wellbeing in the population. Find out more about how such transformation has happened [7].

- Some useful public health terms

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- **Wellbeing**?? used by the World Health Organisation (1946) in its definition of health as ?a state of?complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or inirmity.??More recently the concept was described as ?feeling good and functioning well? (New Economic?Foundation, 2008).?
- **Population Health**?? an approach that aims to improve the health of the entire population and ?tackle health inequalities between different groups in society. Rather than focusing on individuals,?population health addresses a broad range of factors that affect the health of entire populations, such as environment, social structure, and the distribution of resources
- **Health inequalities** ? differences in the health (and increasingly wellbeing) experienced by? different groups in a community which are avoidable and therefore held to be unacceptable
- **Social determinants of health** ? the social and economic conditions in which people are born,? grow, live, work and age, including the health system. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequalities.

Find more terms and definitions related to public health [8]. ?

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**Source URL:** <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/working-health/working-public-health/what-public-health>

**Links**

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/node/1467>

[2] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JPe-U4iLMA&list=PLrVQaAxyJE3fcRxqMPdB1BTNLA5MY2ZUf>

[3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-public-health/what-public-health/video-what-public-health>

[4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-public-health/why-work-public-health>

[5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-public-health/achievements-and-priorities-public-health>

[6] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/public-health>

[7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/resources/brief-history-public-health>

[8] [http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=5f49c434-d792-464c-b51f-8ef760bbae4c&groupId=10180](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=5f49c434-d792-464c-b51f-8ef760bbae4c&groupId=10180)