

Public Health is everybody's business

Transcript of a video by Learning for Public Health West Midlands

Public Health has a number of main aims:

- helping all people across the country improve their health and well-being
- working to prevent the rise of diseases, and to stop people contracting them.
- supporting people with disabilities or long-term conditions, to live their lives to the fullest.
- promoting fairness in health for everybody, regardless of where they live or how much money they earn.

This can be achieved in a number of different roles across public health.

These professions help individuals to address factors such as:

- issues related to age and sex, causing men and women to have different types of diseases at different ages, or genetic factors inherited from family members, which can determine the illnesses you develop and how long you live.
- individual lifestyle factors, such as smoking and consumption of alcohol and drugs.
- social and community networks, including everything from friendship groups to support from your family.
- many other issues, such as how much money your household earns cultural traditions and customs which shape attitudes to health, and environmental factors such as access to safe and clean water.

Professionals such as information analysts can help to identify public health risks specifically related to age, sex and hereditary factors.

This could include looking at patterns and tendencies which make particular people more vulnerable and at risk to certain public health issues.

Other career options could include being a health trainer, helping people to avoid as many risks to their health as possible, by helping and encouraging them to maintain a healthy lifestyle, avoiding risks such as smoking, alcohol abuse and poor diet.

Community development workers contribute to public health, by helping to direct people towards facilities in their local area which improve their well-being.

This could be helping people to find opportunities in education or employment, or pointing them towards local community groups, from sports clubs to youth centres, where they can add to their social networks.

Individuals such as food policy officers play really important roles in ensuring that people have access to nutritious and healthy diets, so they can make the decisions which will help them to live out a healthy lifestyle.

Education is a really important factor for many reasons.

Schools can provide students with the knowledge they need on issues ranging from healthy lifestyles, to mental health, to safe relationships.

Professionals such as school nurses help to promote these important issues, and respond to any concerns which young people might have.

Many individuals spend a large part of their time in the workplace. As a result, occupational health officers play a really important role in making sure that the working environment doesn't expose them to risks such as hazardous materials, or excessively low or high temperatures.

Professionals such as council town planners are responsible for making sure that our local communities are pleasant and support our well-being, and minimise risks such as pollution which can have a negative impact on individual and public health.

Being unemployed can have a negative impact on people's health, especially when it comes to well-being, with many studies showing the impact of unemployment upon self-confidence and mental health.

Well-being practitioners help people to avoid these issues, by working with them and pointing them towards the available services and opportunities they need.

Clean water and sanitation are basic requirements for any healthy society. If clean water is not available, threats such as chronic diseases and poor diet are more likely to be factors in people's lives.

Access to healthcare services is really important for individuals when they require care, not just information on how to prevent poor health. Professionals such as health visitors are crucial in supporting people with disabilities or chronic conditions to live prolonged and valued lives.

In addition to the workplace, people spend a huge proportion of their time at home. People like housing officers play important roles in ensuring that they live in buildings free of issues such as damp, mould and anything else which can cause negative impacts upon health and well-being.

There are six main categories of public health roles, which suit different people according to their career aims and interests.

The first two of these are **Improving People's Health** and **Protecting People's Health**.

If you enjoy subjects such as Psychology, Sociology, Marketing or Communications, you could play a crucial role in actively improving people's health in varied roles such as a health trainer, health promotion specialist, community health practitioner or a health visitor.

Many jobs within this category allow you to work with people to encourage and help them to make positive changes to their behaviour to improve their lives, from stopping smoking to exercising more, from reducing their alcohol intake to overcoming drug addictions.

If you have a more scientific mind and find subjects such as Chemistry and Biology interesting, there are a number of roles which could suit you.

You could be an emergency planning officer designing the ways in which people could be kept safe after a major chemical or radioactive incident, or a health screener helping people to spot possible threats to their health and well-being as early as possible to give them the best chance of recovery.

The next two categories of job roles are **Working with Information**, and **Teaching and Researching**.

Information plays a crucial role in helping a variety of professionals to protect and improve the health of the population.

If you enjoy subjects around Maths or Statistics, ICT or Computer Science, then there are a number of job roles which may suit you.

As a health intelligence analyst, you could be spotting unfair inequalities which mean people have a lower life expectancy just because of the city they were born in. If you are a data officer, you could be helping the NHS prepare for future challenges by studying trends such as rising obesity levels and the care needs required by an ageing population.

Teaching and research plays a huge role in creating this information and evidence, and then sharing it with the professionals who need it in their working lives.

Job roles in this area could include working as a research fellow or lecturer at a university, where you would play a crucial role in teaching the public health workforce of the future, from across the six main categories of job roles.

The final two broad categories are **Maintaining Quality and Standards**, and **Leadership Planning and Management**.

If you are interested in areas such as Business, Economics and Public Policy, a career in Quality and Standards Maintenance could suit you.

This could mean that you would be working with Government and councils to make sure that NHS services are delivered at the level of quality that patients deserve, or promoting safeguarding measures in schools or places of work to protect vulnerable children.

Leadership, planning and management are key aspects of our work, as this is where the plans and policies which will influence public health are created.

You could have a role as part of a scrutiny group, where you will be able use information to judge whether money and services were being used to protect and improve public health in the most effective way possible.

Alternatively, you could be using this evidence to develop the policies which address critical public health issues of the day, for example how to respond to rising childhood obesity.

The qualifications you need vary depending on the careers which you have in mind, and as you now know, there are a huge range of jobs and professions available within public health.

The requirements could range from a good range of GCSEs, to specific foundation public health programmes, to undergraduate degrees in areas such as Nursing, Environmental Health and

Medicine, to postgraduate degrees in Public Health, to five-year training programmes funded by the NHS.

As well as the professions that have already been talked about, the jobs could lead you to work in a huge variety of different workplaces. These could include:

- hospitals and community settings where care takes place
- working for councils and National Government departments, such as the Department of Health and the Department of Education
- schools, colleges or universities
- organisations like HealthTec, promoting careers in health and care, or Public Health England.