



National Public Health Week

What is Public Health?

Public health promotes and protects the health of people and the communities where they live, learn, work and play.

While a doctor treats people who are sick, those of us working in public health try to prevent people from getting sick or injured in the first place. We also promote wellness by encouraging healthy behaviors.

From conducting scientific research to educating about health, people in the field of public health work to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy. That can mean vaccinating children and adults to prevent the spread of disease or educating people about the risks of alcohol and tobacco. Public health sets safety standards to protect workers and develops school nutrition programs to ensure kids have access to healthy food.

Public health works to track disease outbreaks, prevent injuries and shed light on why some of us are more likely to suffer from poor health than others. The many facets of public health include speaking out for laws that promote smoke-free indoor air and seatbelts, spreading the word about ways to stay healthy and giving science-based solutions to problems.

Public health saves money, improves our quality of life, helps children thrive and reduces human suffering.

What impacts our Health?

There is no single cause for poor U.S. health – it cuts across population groups and a wide range of health issues. While individual lifestyle choices play a part, a broad set of social and environmental factors, often beyond our control, both directly affect our health and can limit our ability to make healthy lifestyle choices.

Our health is directly linked to our education

Public health researchers have described education as an “elixir” — a potent factor that’s been linked to increased life expectancy, less disease, delayed aging and a lower risk of unhealthy behaviors

Our health is directly linked to our income

The U.S. is home to greater percentages of people living in poverty, greater income inequality and less economic mobility than other high-income countries.

Our health is linked to what we eat – or don’t eat

We are overfed...

- Americans consume more calories than people in any other country.
- Two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese.

...and undernourished

- 37 percent of U.S. adults eat vegetables less than once a day.
- 23 million people live in food deserts.
- 16 million children go to sleep hungry.
- A healthy family diet can cost \$2,200 more each year than a less-healthy one.

Where we live matters

Unfortunately, our communities aren’t always designed with good health in mind.

Active transportation – Our transportation systems are more focused on car travel at the expense of healthier options to walk, cycle or use public transit. All this time spent in cars is resulting in more stress, more road crashes and higher death rates. And because our communities were engineered to accommodate cars, bicyclists and pedestrians often face risky conditions. In fact, when compared to other high-income nations, our bicyclists and pedestrians suffer up to five times the rate of injury and death.

Nutritious food – Too many of our neighborhoods lack large grocery stores and farmers markets, where residents can easily find fresh produce and nutritious food choices. Instead, such communities — known as food deserts — are typically home to an abundance of fast food and corner convenient stores.

Violence - Not all of our communities are safe places. Violence is the second-leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds in the U.S., with young men ages 15-19 five times more likely to die from violence than those in other high-income countries. In addition, America's gun homicide rates are 20 times higher than in peer countries.

Recreation - People with access to safe outdoor spaces to be physically active tend to report better health. Yet 23 percent of our communities don't have easy access to safe playgrounds, parks, gyms, golf courses and other recreational facilities.

Environmental health – Our health is profoundly affected by the environment in which we live and work. For example, 35 million homes in the U.S. contain at least one health hazard, such as lead, radon or mold. Nearly half the country's population lives in communities with hazardous air pollution levels. For adults living with heart disease and children struggling with chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma, poor air quality restricts their activities and poses serious risks to their health. Today in the U.S., asthma complications are the third-leading cause of childhood hospitalizations.

Source: American Public Health Association

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