

What Does Public Health Mean to You?

The public health system in Ohio is comprised of the Ohio Department of Health working in partnership with some 120 local health departments. Local health departments, often referred to as health districts, like school districts, maintain independent governance and receive the vast majority of their funding from the support of their communities. But what is public health?

Even public health professionals struggle to precisely define public health. It's often referred to as an invisible profession because people don't hear much about it until a disaster or community health emergency occurs. In simple terms, public health strives to improve the health of the community through disease and injury prevention, health promotion, and protection. While medical practice focuses on the health of an individual, public health is concerned with the health of the community.

If you have eaten out at a local restaurant, cooled off in a public swimming pool, have children in the public schools, spent the weekend at a nearby campground, or purchased a snack from a roadside vendor, you have been served by the local health department. If you attend church or community events, stand in line at the grocery store, or gather with others at a sporting event, the public health system has been protecting you. If your community could be victim of a powerful storm, a large fire, or other natural or manmade disaster, your health department is preparing for you. It's a rather inclusive list—public health benefits all of us.

Under contract with the local school districts, the Adams County Health Department provides nurses to care for students with both acute and chronic health needs. Public health nurses provide immunizations, participate in health promotion activities, and work with epidemiologists to detect and prevent the spread of infectious diseases in the county.

The Environmental Health division is responsible for the inspection and licensing of retail food establishments, public swimming pools, campgrounds, and private water and sewage systems. While the sanitarians are responsible for enforcing Ohio public health codes, they see their primary role as educational and to help ensure safe food, water, and recreation for their community. The sanitarians also investigate public health nuisances and exposure to rabies.

In cooperation with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Homeland Security, state and county emergency management agencies, and local fire, emergency medical, and law enforcement agencies, the Adams County Health Department continually prepares for natural and manmade disasters. These contingency plans are regularly assessed and adjusted as needed through multiagency exercises and drills.

In addition to public health nursing, environmental health, and emergency preparedness, the Adams County Health Department's Vital Statistics section provides certified copies of birth and death records.

To learn more about public health and what it means to you, contact the Adams County Health Department at 937-544-0400.

William E. Hablitzel, M.D. is the Adams County Health Commissioner. He can be reached at the Adams County Health Department, 923 Sunrise Avenue, West Union, Ohio, 45693