

History of Public Health

1500 B.C.

Leviticus is believed to be the first written health code in world. The book dealt with personal and community responsibilities and included guidance regarding the cleanliness of body, sexual health behaviors, protection against contagious diseases and the isolation of lepers.

Early Ideas about Disease

500-1500 A.D.

The Middle Ages were also known as "The Dark Ages. Health problems were considered to have spiritual causes and solutions. Illness was considered to be the result of sin thus stigmatizing the victim. Bloodletting and alchemy were common practices. Most importantly, this failure to consider the role of the environment in health led to epidemics and the inability to control them.

1500-1700 A.D.

During the Renaissance, there was rebirth of thinking about nature and humans. Careful accounts of disease outbreaks showed that saints as well as sinners got sick and critical observations led to more accurate descriptions of symptoms and outcomes. The rise of mercantilism highlighted the value of a healthy and productive population, leading to advances in occupational health. There was also an increased concern about infant mortality as a threat to long term availability of a productive working society.

1700-1800

There were two prevailing views of the causes of epidemics. **Miasmatic** theory held that epidemics stemmed from certain atmospheric conditions and from miasmas rising from organic materials. **Contagion** theory held that epidemics resulted from transmission of germs.

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People of Importance in Public Health

1796

Edward Jenner (1749-1843) published his first paper on the potential for inoculation, which led to the development of the small pox vaccine.

1842

A social reformer, Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890), published his landmark report, *Report on the Inquiry into Sanitary Conditions of the Laboring Population of Great Britain*. This report outlined the major public health challenges facing England at the time leading to the beginnings of reform.

1850

In Boston, Lemuel Shattuck (1793-1859) released a report outlining the public health needs in the state of Massachusetts and included recommendations to create the first state board of health.

1854

John Snow (1813-1858) was the first to link the cholera epidemic in London to one particular water source—the Broad Street Pump. When the pump handle was removed the disease incidence drastically decreased. This was the birth of applied epidemiology

1862

French microbiologist, Louis Pasteur (1822-1895), conducted experiments that supported the germ theory and effectively debunked the theory of spontaneous generation. He invented a process (pasteurization) in which liquids such as milk were heated to kill all bacteria and molds.

1928

Scottish physician Alexander Fleming (1881-1955) inadvertently discovered Penicillin while studying molds. Fleming had served as a physician during WWI and had seen the horrific effect of infection in military hospitals. This discovery would be one of the most important discoveries of the Twentieth Century for its ability to kill bacteria and fight infectious disease.

1962

Rachel Carson (1907-1964)'s book *Silent Spring* led to greater awareness of the dangers of chemical pesticides to humans. *Silent Spring* played in the history of environmentalism roughly the same role that Uncle Tom's Cabin played in the abolitionist movement.

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Organizations/Agencies Established

1799

Boston formed the first board of health. Paul Revere, silversmith and dentist, was the chairperson of this board.

1798

The U.S. federal government created the Marine Hospital Service to address health issues relating to maritime trade, such as yellow fever, scurvy and health threats brought to the U.S. from other countries on ships.

1872

The American Public Health Association was founded. APHA is the oldest and largest organization of public health professionals in the world.

1902

The Marine Hospital Service became the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service in recognition of its expanding activities in the field of public health. In 1912, the name was shortened to the Public Health Service.

1946

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was established in Atlanta as the Communicable Disease Center.

1948

The World Health Organization (WHO) was established by the United Nations. The WHO inherited much of the mandate and resources of its predecessor, the Health Organization (HO), which had been an agency of the League of Nations.

1970

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established under the Nixon Administration. The EPA is charged with protecting human health and with safeguarding air, water, and land.

1881

The Indiana State Board of Health was established in 1881 and renamed the Indiana State Department of Health in 1992.

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Other Events in Public Health

1964

Luther L. Terry, M.D. (1911-1985), Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service, released the report of the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health. That landmark document, now referred to as the first Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health, was America's first widely publicized official recognition that cigarette smoking was a cause of cancer and other serious diseases.

1966

The International Smallpox Eradication Program was established and led by the U.S. Public Health Service. The worldwide eradication of smallpox was accomplished in 1977.

1981

A mysterious epidemic was identified as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). It was found to be caused by the Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). It is now a global pandemic.

1990

The Nutrition Labeling Education Act was signed into law. The act required food manufacturers to disclose the fat (saturated and unsaturated), cholesterol, sodium, sugar, fiber, protein, and carbohydrate content in their products. This gave consumers new ways of monitoring their nutritional intake.

1998

The Master Settlement Agreement was signed with the tobacco industry. Forty-six states settled lawsuits in which they sought to recover tobacco-related health care costs and to hold the tobacco companies accountable for decades of wrongdoing.

2003

The Human Genome Project was completed after 13 years of work. There were clear practical results even before the work was complete. The field of public health genomics appeared, assessing the impact of genes and their interaction with behavior, diet, and the environment on the population's health.

2005

Hurricane Katrina devastated the U.S. Gulf Coast. The levees in New Orleans broke leading to massive flooding destroying much of the city. The accompanying contamination of the water from decaying bodies and other organic matter as well as chemical toxins resulted in the largest public health disaster the U.S. has ever seen. Federal cuts in funding for public health infrastructure left the city and the rest of the Gulf coast unable to adequately respond.