

## What is Public Health? The Long and the Short of it. AUGUST 2005

“Public Health is the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through organized efforts of society.”

John Last, *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*

The public health system works to keep you healthy and safe: at home, work, school and play—everywhere in the community.

### The Long...

The public health system focuses on the health of entire communities or distinct groups of people—that is, ‘populations’. Public health approaches include health promotion, disease prevention and health inspection services. These approaches are based on continuous assessment of needs and strengths of the population and on careful monitoring of possibly harmful community conditions. The focus is on promoting and supporting health.

Immunization, restaurant inspection, monitoring air quality, wellbaby clinics, and responding to health emergencies are a few public health services.

The public health system works behind the scenes to:

- ensure safe food, water and air,
- make communities and work places safer,
- prevent disease and injury,
- provide information about healthy lifestyle choices,
- monitor and report on risks for disease and injury,
- strengthen community efforts for health,
- work for laws that protect your health and safety.

Because public health works to prevent health problems before they appear, it is often invisible even though our lives depend on it.

Think back to SARS, to Walkerton, to avian flu. With strong public health systems, diseases can be prevented and their impacts reduced.

The public health system works beside Medicare (the publicly funded health care system, which focuses on individuals who require specific services to maintain health and prevent illness). Both systems are essential to ensure that Canadians achieve the highest possible quality of life.

### and the Short...

The public health system aims to keep you, your family, your workplace and your community well. It is made up of well-trained and specialized professionals who promote health and prevent disease and injury.

### What can we do?

Together we can:

- talk to governments about how their decisions affect your health and community,
- support public health programs in your community,
- make a personal commitment to learn and adopt healthy living practices.

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**S U P P O R T P U B L I C H E A L T H !**

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This message brought to you by the Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21st Century (CCPH21)  
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**Canadian Coalition for Public Health in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Membership (April 2009)**  
**Coalition canadienne pour la santé publique au 21<sup>e</sup> siècle – organisations membres (avril 2009)**

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Association of Canadian Academic HealthCare Organizations	L'Alliance canadienne de la maladie mentale et de la santé mentale
Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health	L'Alliance pour la prévention des maladies chroniques du Canada
Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists	L'Ambulance SaintJean
Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists	L'Association canadienne de physiothérapie
Canadian Association for School Health	L'Association canadienne de santé dentaire publique
Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry	L'Association canadienne de santé publique
Canadian Chiropractic Association	L'Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes
Canadian Dental Association	L'Association canadienne des hygiénistes dentaires
Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion	L'Association canadienne des institutions de santé universitaires
Canadian Dental Hygienists Association	L'Association canadienne des soins de santé
Canadian Diabetes Association	L'Association canadienne des médecins vétérinaires
Canadian Healthcare Association	L'Association canadienne du diabète
Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Institute of Population and Public Health	L'Association canadienne pour la santé en milieu scolaire
Canadian Medical Association	L'Association chiropratique canadienne
Canadian Nurses Association	L'Association dentaire canadienne
Canadian Paediatric Society	L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers du Canada
Canadian Pharmacists Association	L'Association des pharmaciens du Canada
Canadian Physiotherapy Association	L'Association médicale canadienne
Canadian Psychological Association	L'Association pour la prévention des infections à l'hôpital et dans la communauté
Canadian Public Health Association	L'Association pulmonaire
Canadian Society for International Health	La Coalition canadienne pour la sensibilisation et la promotion de la vaccination
Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science	The Dalla Lana School of Public Health, l'Université de Toronto
Canadian Veterinary Medical Association	Les diététistes du Canada
Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada	La faculté de Santé, l'Université de York
The College of Family Physicians of Canada	L'Institut de recherche Élisabeth-Bruyère
Community & Hospital Infection Control Association Canada	Les Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada, l'Institut de la santé publique et des populations
The Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto	Médecins pour un Canada sans fumée
Dietitians of Canada	SécuriJeunes Canada
Élisabeth-Bruyère Research Institute	La Société canadienne de pédiatrie
Faculty of Health, York University	La Société canadienne de psychologie
National Specialty Society for Community Medicine	La Société canadienne de santé internationale
St. John Ambulance	La Société canadienne de science de laboratoire médical
Physicians for a SmokeFree Canada	La Société nationale de spécialistes pour la médecine communautaire
Safe Kids Canada	
The Lung Association	