

Glossary



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Aboriginal

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antibiotic

Also referred to as “antimicrobial,” a class of substances produced by living organisms, such as fungi, capable of inhibiting the growth of pathogenic bacteria.

antigen

A substance, such as protein, living tissue or organ, which is alien to the body and induces a specific immune response.

antitoxin

A substance such as a serum or medication that inhibits or prevents the action of a toxin. Examples include tetanus and diphtheria antitoxins, which prevent the harm that would otherwise be done by the toxins these organisms produce.

anthrax

A bacterial disease of humans and animals caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, which can enter the body via the skin, inhalation or ingestion.

arsenical

A class of chemicals containing arsenic compounds. Arsenic, an acute and chronic poison, was formerly used in medicinal compounds, including Paul Ehrlich’s “magic bullet” used to treat syphilis in the early 20th century.

asthma

A recurrent, chronic disease of the lungs characterized by narrowing of small airways.

attenuate

To weaken, dilute, reduce or eliminate the harmful effects of a pathogenic organism or its antigens for use in vaccines.

bacillus

Rod-shaped bacterium, originally used to describe all bacteria with this shape but now confined to a single genus of spore-forming organisms.

barbituate

A derivative of barbituric acid that acts as a sedative or hypnotic by depressing the respiratory rate, blood pressure, temperature, and central nervous system.

—*Mosby's Medical Dictionary*

bulbar

Bulbar polio occurs when the polio virus attacks the brainstem, and the nerve centres that control swallowing and talking are damaged. Secretions collect in the throat and may lead to suffocation.

—*Britannica Online Encyclopedia*

botulism

A food-borne illness caused by ingesting the toxin of *Clostridium botulinum*, typically in vegetables or meat prepared without adequate hygienic precautions.

Canadian Journal of Public Health

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chancroid

A sexually-transmitted disease causing painful, ulcerating genital lesions.

cholera

An acute bacterial enteric disease that causes profuse watery diarrhea. Without treatment, fluid loss often results in death.

cohort effect

Cohort refers to the population group born in a particular period, generally a year or a decade, i.e., a birth cohort. A cohort effect is any effect associated with being a member of a group born at roughly the same time and bonded by common life experiences (e.g., growing up in the 1980s).

—*Encyclopedia.com*

community health

Although often equated with “public health,” it means a community in which there are no pervasive health problems, no systemic poverty, unemployment, or social pathology.

congenital

Existing at or dating from birth, i.e., congenital deafness.

convalescent serum

Liquid components of blood plasma taken from someone who has recuperated from a particular infection, which may be of use in treating someone with the same infection. dental caries

dental caries

Tooth decay.

diabetes

A systemic disease in which carbohydrate metabolism is disrupted by an insufficient supply of insulin to meet the body’s needs.

diphtheria

An acute bacterial disease that primarily affects the upper respiratory tract, causing obstruction of the airway. The causal organism, the diphtheria bacillus, also produces a toxin that causes paralysis of respiratory muscles and myocarditis.

epidemic

The occurrence in a specific population of deaths or cases of a condition in numbers greater than usual expectation for a given time.

epidemiology

A science based on observation, inference, and experiment, to evaluate therapeutic and preventive regimens aimed at controlling health conditions.

eugenics

Coined in 1883 by British biologist Francis Galton, meaning good breeding, eugenics became a prominent feature of public health theory, whereby those regarded to be excellent genetic stock such as outstanding scholars and

athletes, were encouraged to reproduce. Others were deemed unfit to reproduce because of low intelligence, mental disorders, or certain classes of chronic illness and disability such as tuberculosis and alcoholism.

—*John Last*

First Nations

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Labrador Métis, and European). Inuit replaces the term Eskimo and refers to the Indigenous peoples of the North.
—*Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*

flu

Also called “flu” and “grippe,” an acute infectious disease primarily of the respiratory tract caused by the influenza virus. “Epidemic influenza” often has a high case fatality rate.

fluoridation

The planned, systematic addition of carefully measured amounts of sodium fluoride to drinking water supplies.

fumigation

The process of applying or injecting pesticide fumes into a closed space with the aim of disinfecting it or ridding the space of pests, such as insects or rats.

gonorrhoea

A common sexually-transmitted infection that can be virtually symptomless in women but that causes a painful urethritis in men.

health promotion

The policies and processes that enable people to increase control over and improve their health, addressing the needs of the population as a whole.

hepatitis

Inflammation of the liver, can be caused by virus or bacterial infections and various chemicals, including alcohol.

hygiene

The principles and practices dealing with preservation of good health, which involves values that determine individual and collective behaviour, including a commitment to cleanliness in food handling, sanitary waste disposal, the elimination of vermin and prevention of pollution.

immunization

Also called vaccination, the artificial induction of active immunity by introducing the specific antigen of a disease-causing organism, usually by injection or orally.

Indians

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industrial hygiene

The art and science devoted to recognition, evaluation, and control of the environmental factors and stresses that occur in, or are related to, the workplace and working conditions, that may cause impaired health and well-being.

influenza

Also called “flu” and “grippe,” an acute infectious disease primarily of the respiratory tract caused by the influenza virus. “Epidemic influenza” often has a high case fatality rate.

inoculation

A synonym for “vaccination,” the artificial induction of active immunity by introducing the specific antigen of a disease-causing organism, usually by injection or orally.

insulin

An essential hormone produced by the pancreas which is required in the metabolization of carbohydrate and fat.

Inuit

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iron lung

A lay term for the type of respirator invented by American Philip Drinker, which works by encasing the body in an airtight cylinder within which the air pressure is alternately raised and lowered to assist with inhalation and exhalation when respiratory muscles are paralyzed.

Journal of Public Health

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League of Nations

An international organization created at the end of World War I to protect peace and security through arbitration of international disputes.

—*Canadian Encyclopedia Online*

Lower Canada

A British colony created in 1791, in what is now the province of Quebec.

—*Canadian Encyclopedia Online*

malaria

A severe mosquito-borne protozoan infection of the blood and blood-forming organs, causing recurrent bouts of high fever due to the destruction of red blood corpuscles by malaria parasites.

measles

A highly-infectious virus disease with very high case rate fatalities among infants and young children if they are not vaccinated.

meningitis

Inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord caused by bacteria or viruses. This life-threatening disease can occur in epidemics and as a complication of other infectious diseases. It can be prevented with type-specific vaccines.

mental hygiene

Also called mental health, the branch of health care concerned with the prevention and treatment of diseases of the mind.

Métis

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—*Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*

morbidity

Sickness, the condition of being unwell.

neuralgia

Chronic nerve pain.
—*MayoClinic.com*

obstetrics

The medical specialty concerned with caring for pregnant women, the management of their labour and delivery, and their care during the postpartum period.

orthopedic

Applies to the surgical specialty that deals with fractures, dislocations, and other lesions of bones and joints, emphasizing the correction of bone deformities.

pandemic

An epidemic that transcends national boundaries and extends over much or all of the world.

pasteurization

Heat treatment of milk, dairy products and other foodstuffs to kill potentially harmful microorganisms.

pasteurize

To heat-treat milk, dairy products and other food to kill potentially harmful microorganisms.

pathologist

A specialist in pathology, the scientific study of changes in body tissues and organs associated with the occurrence and progression of diseases.

penicillin

The first effective antibiotic derived from a fungus or mold, a discovery made in 1928 by Alexander Fleming.

pertussis

Also called whooping cough, a debilitating bacterial respiratory disease of children that is often prolonged, and can cause emphysema.

physiology

The science concerned with the way the body and its organs and tissues function.

plague

One of the most dangerous contagious diseases, it is caused by a bacterium that is transmitted to humans by the bites of rat fleas.

pneumonia

An inflammatory disease of lung tissue caused by bacteria or viruses in which the alveolar spaces fill with fluid and impair the ability to exchange air efficiently.

polio

Also known as poliomyelitis, a contagious virus disease transmitted by the fecal-oral route. Usually associated with symptomless development of antibodies, it can cause acute inflammation and disruption of spinal nerve functioning, resulting in paralysis of the muscles controlled by those nerves. Paralytic poliomyelitis can be prevented by vaccination with killed organisms in the Salk vaccine or ingestion of live attenuated Sabin vaccine.

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privy

An outhouse.

prophylactic

Relating to prophylaxis, the preventive management of disease in individuals and populations.

prophylaxis

The preventive management of disease in individuals and populations.

public health engineer

Also called “sanitary engineer,” a professionally trained engineer specializing in sanitary disposal of sewage, design and working of sewage treatment plants, and/or provision of pure, safe drinking water and other aspects of environmental surveillance and control, including air quality and solid waste disposal.

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public health nurse

A member of the nursing profession with specialized training in the theories and practices of public health. Public health nurses provide maternal, infant and early child care services, health education, contact tracing in communicable disease surveillance and control, and home visits to the elderly and infirm, among other specialized roles.

quarantine

Isolation of an animal or person who is a known contact of a case of a contagious disease in order to prevent transmission of the disease to others.

rabies

An almost invariably fatal virus disease transmitted in saliva of an infected animal. In humans, a long incubation period may precede symptoms of apprehension, followed by delirium, fever, convulsions and death. Once known as *hydrophobia*, from an aversion to or fear of water.

risk

The probability that an event will occur. In the nontechnical sense, the word covers several meanings and measures of probability, and these often obscure the technical meaning and confuse “risk” with “hazard,” which can mean any potentially harmful agent or factor. In technical discussions, as in actuarial

estimates and environmental risk assessment, the use of the word “risk” is best confined to contexts in which a probability of an event can be estimated or calculated.

sanatorium

A specialized hospital for the care and treatment of tuberculosis.

sanitary

Referring to sanitation, a set of public health policies and actions to provide safe drinking water and hygienic disposal of human, animal, domestic and industrial waste, thus minimizing the risks of transmitting fecal-oral diseases.

sanitary inspector

Also called a health inspector, or sanitarian, a technically trained specialist who detects environmental risks to health due to deficiencies in sanitation, ventilation, food handling, and hygiene.

sanitation

A set of public health policies and actions to provide safe drinking water and hygienic disposal of human, animal, and domestic and industrial waste, thus minimizing the risks of transmitting fecal-oral disease.

scarlet fever

Also called scarlatina, a contagious disease formerly common among children and young adults, caused by an infection, with a rash on the face and limbs, and often followed by rheumatic fever. Without treatment, it was often serious and even fatal, but it has become rare and mostly innocuous.

septic

Contaminated with bacteria, or relating to a septic system to dispose of sewage.
—*Oxford Canadian Dictionary*

sexually transmitted disease

The term “venereal disease” was replaced by “sexually-transmitted disease” (STD) in the 1970s because the new term was less disreputable and more encompassing. (The term “sexually-transmitted infection” (STI) is used today to include infection that may not always lead to disease.)

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smallpox

Also known as variola, this highly contagious virus disease occurred in devastating epidemics with mortality rates as great as 30% to 40% until a smallpox (cowpox) vaccine was

successfully tested in 1796–98 by British country doctor Edward Jenner. Smallpox was declared globally eradicated in 1980 by the World Health Organization.

social hygiene

A movement associated with the prevention of venereal diseases, that included values and morals related to the repression of vice and prostitution and the restriction of sexual activity to married persons for the purpose of procreation.

STD

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syphilis

The most serious and deadly sexually-transmitted infection until the appearance of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. The first and worst venereal disease, it first appeared in Europe in the late 14th or early 15th century where it occurred in florid epidemic form that was acute and often rapidly fatal, to a more chronic form with a latent period, then tertiary syphilis, affecting the central nervous system, cardiovascular system, and sometimes other organs. Several decades after the 1950s, syphilis

was well-controlled and became uncommon, but has entered a period of resurgence, mainly among persons with compromised immune systems because of HIV/AIDS infection.

TB

A bacterial disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. An estimated one-third of the world's population is infected with tuberculosis (TB) but only a small proportion have active disease, most commonly of the lungs although other organs may be affected. Formerly referred to as the white plague, because of the pale complexion of those afflicted.

tetanus

A generalized disease due to a toxin which usually invades the body in a laceration or compound fracture that was inadequately cleaned; the tetanus toxin causes muscle spasms and rigidity of voluntary muscles.

toxoid

A bacterial or other toxin that has been treated with formaldehyde to reduce its toxicity without reducing its antigenic property. Diphtheria vaccine and tetanus vaccine are prepared from toxoids.

tuberculosis

A bacterial disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. An estimated one-third of the world's population is infected with tuberculosis (TB) but only a small proportion have active disease, most commonly of the lungs although other organs may be affected. Formerly referred to as the white plague, because of the pale complexion of those afflicted.

typhoid

Also called enteric fever, typhoid is a serious systemic disease usually transmitted by the fecal-oral route or by water or food contaminated with *Salmonella typhi*. Typhoid formerly

had a case fatality rate of 10% to 20% but it responds well to antibiotics and sanitation and safe drinking water have virtually eliminated it in modern, urban settings.

typhus fever

A serious epidemic disease, transmitted by the body louse, with a high mortality rate if untreated. Typhus fever is typically associated with dirty, verminous clothing and overcrowding.

undulant fever

Known today as "brucellosis," a communicable disease caused by *Brucella* organisms, occurring in goats, cows and other domestic animal, transmitted to humans in milk or by direct contact.

unvaccinated

A person or animal who has not received the specific antigen of a disease-causing organism.

Upper Canada

A British colony created in 1791, in what is now the province of Ontario.

—*Canadian Encyclopedia Online*

vaccination

Also called immunization, the artificial induction of active immunity by introducing the specific antigen of a disease-causing organism, usually by injection or orally.

vaccine

The biologically active antigen that is injected or taken orally to immunize (vaccinate) individuals against communicable diseases.

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vital statistics

Data on births, deaths, marriage and divorce compiled by government authorities at the national, regional or local level to identify public health problems and progress.