Public Health

What does someone in public health do?

♦ Public Health has a mission to create conditions in which people can be healthy. Their primary focus is on prevention of disease and injury rather than treatment.

♦ Through organized, interdisciplinary efforts that address the physical, mental and environmental health concerns of communities and populations, public health specialists work to make our communities healthier.

♦ Public health officials assess the health requirements of communities, prioritize needs, and create public policy.

♦ Many health care professionals pair their training with a public health degree to address needs of their local communities including disease prevention and lifestyle.

♦ Possibilities abound within the field of public health.

♦ Environmental health scientists are concerned with the safety of the food supply, water and air pollution and disease prevention. This field includes specialists in industrial hygiene, hazardous substances management, human nutrition, occupational and environmental safety, and toxicology.

♦ Biostatisticians apply statistical and mathematical methods to the design and analysis of public health problems.

♦ Epidemiologists track the distribution of diseases, how debilitating these diseases are, and how to prevent their occurrence.

♦ Health education specialists and health behaviorists have a comprehensive understanding of health in families, communities and populations. They are extensively involved in health promotion and education.

♦ Health management administrators specialize in health planning, organization, policy formation and analysis, finance, economics, or marketing [a separate Masters of Health Administration (MHA) is also available].

♦ Emergency preparedness is a growing field within public health as well. People with training in all areas of public health are involved in creating emergency plans for communities.

♦ Nutrition and Maternal and Child Health are also targeted areas in public health.

♦ All of these specialties can be employed on an international level as well. A doctoral level of training is also available for those who want to focus on research and teaching.

How do I become a public health professional?

♦ Most people in public health have at least a master’s degree (usually an MPH, Master of Public Health, but sometimes an MSPH which is a Master of Science in Public Health).

♦ Public health degrees are usually interdisciplinary and incorporate a wide range of interests and abilities.

♦ Many programs also offer dual degree programs including MD/MPH, MPH/MBA, MPH/DDS.

What is the job outlook?

♦ Since so many different careers exist within the field of public health, income, employment prospects and job growth are dependent on the particular position and the location.

♦ Jobs are available both domestically and internationally ranging from local health departments and industry to government laboratories including the Centers for Disease Control.

♦ Some jobs require extensive field work and others are primarily in an office setting.

♦ Average salaries range from about $32,000 to $130,000.

What prerequisite courses do I need?

♦ Undergraduate coursework is largely dependent on the areas of interest in public health.

♦ Generally a broad background is useful including basic sciences like chemistry and biology, ethics, religion, social sciences (especially courses on international settings and on diversity), education and communications classes, political science and public policy, statistics, and psychology.

♦ In general, solid oral and written communication skills are necessary and knowledge of a second language is always valuable.
What else do I need to do before I apply?

- Observation with public health professionals is advisable though not required.
- Most programs will require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and a TOEFL exam for those whose first language is not English.

How do I apply?

- Application is made through an application service called SOPHAS for participating programs.
- Direct application may be necessary for other programs that do not use SOPHAS.
- Attendance at a CEPH (Council on Education of Public Health) accredited school is recommended.
- The regional programs are listed below.

Where can I get more information?

- **What is Public Health?**
  http://whatispublichealth.org/

- **Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH)**
  http://asph.org

- **American Public Health Association**
  http://www.apha.org

- **SOPHAS**
  http://asph.org

- **Programs in the region:**
  - **Purdue University**
    http://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hk/mph/
  - **Indiana University** (IUPUI)
    http://pbhealth.iupui.edu/
  - **Ohio State University**
    http://sph.osu.edu
  - **University of Illinois at Chicago**
    http://publichealth.uic.edu/
  - **University of Kentucky**
    http://www.mc.uky.edu/publichealth
  - **University of Michigan**
    http://www.sph.umich.edu/

For more information about public health programs or your interests in the health professions, contact the Center for Pre-Professional Advising at 765-496-2690 or preprofessional@purdue.edu.

Information for this career guide came from the above websites, **Explore Health Careers**, http://www.explorehlthcareers.org and those of individual schools.