

Preparing Students to be Good and Healthy Citizens in the 21st Century

This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

Hi, I'm Dr. Julie Gerberding, the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or known to many of you as the CDC.

I'm hoping that our conversation today might entice some of you to get interested in the field of public health, and if it doesn't interest you as a career, I hope it will interest you as something that you take to heart in terms of protecting your own health and the health of the people you care for.

Now, when I was a student, I really didn't know what public health was, nor did I particularly care. But I have learned throughout my recent career, what an incredible national treasure our public health system really is. So when we think about public health, we are not thinking about the kind of disease care that goes on in the context of a hospital or a clinic. We are thinking about the kinds of services and community support that helps protect people's health, hopefully before they are at risk or before they require disease treatments. Let me give you some examples of that.

Health protection is about promoting health. It's about creating the policies and the rules that prohibits smoking in public places or encourage families to create smoke free environments for their young children so that children don't grow up with the harmful consequences of breathing tobacco smoke in their early years. Public health is about prevention of chronic diseases, as well as injuries and disabilities and infections diseases. For example, the immunization programs that all children experience as they grow up and begin to enter school are part of the public health system, or the vaccines that some teenagers need to take before they go to college; those are all aspects of protecting health through the prevention of an infections disease.

But public health is also about preparedness. In these days, we know that we may experience threats from Mother Nature, or from terrorists, or from other problems in our society, and we have a responsibility to make sure that communities are protected and prepared for those kinds of threats. So when you hear someone talk about a home health kit so that you have the supplies and food you need to withstand some kind of a natural disaster or an infectious disease or pandemic, or when you hear people talk about preparedness at the community level, where the school systems and the businesses and the health care environments are planning and exercising to be sure they can keep the community safe in the time of a disaster, these are all various dimensions of public health.

Public health is also about science, and some of the most incredible scientists in the world work for CDC and our health departments at the state and local level. We also have incredible scientists in schools of public health, in medical schools, and in universities across our country.

The science of public health is incredibly varied. The core is epidemiology, which is the study of what causes diseases. Surveillance is the process that we use to detect and respond to new threats in the community. But the science also includes laboratories: the ability to detect and diagnose infectious diseases, chemical exposures, toxins, or occupational threats. It includes the science of informatics: how we manage information in the electronic era. It also includes the sciences of health diplomacy and how we learn to lead and generate trust in our credibility as a entity and as a nation in the international arena, and I think increasingly the science of public health is about communication. It's about the ability to not only learn what we need to know, but practice what we preach in our schools, in our work places, and in our homes across the country. It's really one of the most exciting opportunities that you can imagine. If you are interested in a career in public health, by all means please check out the CDC website at www.cdc.gov.

We believe it's so important to encourage students to engage in this career that we've been working with the Association of American Colleges and Universities, as well some other organizations, to help make public health education part of your learning curriculum in school. We have actually developed the first courses, such as Public Health 101, Epidemiology 101, and Global Health 101. These courses are ready for use and we're hoping teachers around our nation will help sign people up and get interested in them, even if they are not really planning a career in public health. You can take a look at these on the web site supported by the Association of Schools of Public Health. But you know it's more than just a curriculum, it's really about a concept. The health of our citizens, of our families, and our nation really affects all of us, and the more we know the more we can share about protecting health and the more progress we can make in living a healthier, and I hope a much happier, life.

So we at CDC support all these efforts. We hope we can excite and interest young people in the profession, but certainly we hope we can excite you in the prospects of protecting your own health and that of the people you care for. We look forward to seeing you soon. Thank you.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.