

## A Day without Public Health

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Public health is like an unseen force that does a phenomenal job at protecting and maintaining the well-being of people to avoid disaster. Despite its importance, it is seldom the topic of discussion and few recognize its victories. To show someone the importance of public health as a whole, I would help them to imagine going through just one ordinary day without it.

To do this, we would need to think of every aspect of our day that has been impacted by public health. Let's start with the morning. We would start our day *without* the recommended 8 hours of sleep, meaning our bodies will not be fully prepared for the day. We will then eat a non-nutritious breakfast of foods that have not been inspected by the USDA for quality and do not abide by pesticide residue limits. Next we choose not to brush our teeth and drink water that has not been fluoridated. Already we are subjecting ourselves to sluggishness, obesity, chemical exposures, and tooth decay, and we haven't even left the house yet!

Next we leave our house but oh no! We fall off the stairs because hand rails have not been installed. We limp through our yard to the driveway and notice the grass is perfectly green due to the unsafe amount of herbicides and we cringe to see our neighbor's children playing in the yard. We get into our car which has no seat belt, air bags, or shatter proof windshields, and we start our engine. A big puff of black smoke explodes out the exhaust pipe because emission controls have never been implemented. We again cringe as we see the neighbor's children inhale the black smoke that we know contains carcinogenic and toxic materials.

On the road to our job we swerve many times because road signs and lane dividers have never been constructed and we need full concentration (which is hard to muster due to our lack of sleep) to avoid oncoming traffic. We don't stop at the doctors to get the mole on our back checked out as screening isn't something that is done. After parking at work, we greet and shake hands with a co-worker who just coughed into his hands – germ transmission prevention has never been addressed and we do not think to wash our hands before rubbing the last bit of sleep out of our eyes. We take the elevator up to our office and sit down for the next 8 hours – in a world without public health there is no need to exercise or stretch our bodies throughout the day.

In our office we sit in uncomfortable chairs and bend our wrists at uncomfortable angles on our keyboards as the field of ergonomics has never been created. We feel our wrists and low backs hurting, but we do not realize that in the future this minor pain will become a larger pain and will result in medical costs and physical limitations. We breathe in indoor air that is not well circulated, and we surround ourselves with furniture and building materials that are made of chemicals that are not safe. We see people working in the machine shop down the hall without proper ear protection and we see people carrying loads that are much too heavy, and we know they are a decibel away from hearing loss, and a slip away from a broken back.

This is really just half a day in someone's typical life, but we can see from this story where public health has never been created, that public health has really influenced every single aspect of our lives. Public health has made our world cleaner, our jobs and lives safer, and our relationships with others more hygienic. Public health is really a truly incredible accomplishment, from the seemingly simple handrails, to the more complex vaccines, and I think that ironically, imagining a world without it, is a way to bring attention to it.