Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
PolicyLab

# Why We Need a Public Health Approach to COVID-19 in 200 Words

Population Health Sciences

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As we discuss how to re-open communities following the first wave of what is likely to be a long epidemic, we need many important opinions at the table, perhaps none as important, though, as the field of public health.

Public health is a scrappy field—chronically under-resourced, often misunderstood, and not infrequently in the crosshairs of ideological debates about the role of government, particularly when it comes to vaccination requirements. The field has always had to be pragmatic to get work done, and the essential functions of public health are not always seen by the public. But often, it comes up big when we need it, as we do right now.

At its best, public health is a collaborative discipline—a methodological powerhouse (think: epidemiology, biostatistics, health economics, advanced qualitative methods) alongside a robust and disciplined operational arm (think: policy, communications, program implementation, community mobilization). It emphasizes prevention as an underpinning to all policies, a foundational principle for governing.

In the face of pandemics and other widespread emergencies and threats, public health—with its directive to protect populations—is the discipline we want in our corner.

Any approach to prevent a re-emergence of COVID-19 should be informed by evidence. Public health has an abundance—this is not our first rodeo. The tools we find in the literature may not be flashy, but they will have been tested—for feasibility, acceptance, effectiveness—and have lessons to offer. That's the basis for our new policy review, which we encourage decision-makers to use as a roadmap for building their COVID-19 mitigation responses.

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*This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategic Operations & Communications Director Lauren Walens.*

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