

GLOSSARY FOR THE ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS

This glossary includes certain terms used in the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS). Some of the Protocols that are incorporated into the OPHS also include a Protocol-specific glossary of terms.

Assessment

As one of the core functions of public health, assessment involves the systematic collection and analysis of data in order to provide a basis for decision-making. This may include collecting statistics on local health status, health needs, and/or other public health issues.¹

Best practices

The consensus of expert panels regarding acceptable organization, staffing, and provision of services by a public health agency, medical clinic, hospital, or other health care facility. The criteria for 'best practices' are sometimes called benchmarks.²

Burden of disease

Severity of a health set-back for an individual or population, measured by cost, mortality, morbidity, and other key indicators. Knowledge of the burden of disease can help determine how investment in health should be targeted.³

Climate change

Climate change is the change in climate over time. The term refers to both natural and human-induced changes. Many industrial activities have been shown to negatively impact the chemical composition of the atmosphere through the build-up of greenhouse gases that trap heat and reflect it back to the earth's surface. This results in changes to the earth's climate, including a rise in global temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events.⁴

Community capacity

Community capacity, in the field of health promotion, refers to enhancing the ability of an individual, organization or community to address health issues and concerns. The process of capacity building relies heavily on collaboration and partnerships, and therefore health practitioners often build community capacity on a variety of levels simultaneously. It also refers to the knowledge, skill sets, participation, leadership and resources required to effectively address health issues and concerns.⁵

Continuity of operations plan

Process of developing advance arrangements and procedures that enable an organization to respond to an event in such a manner that critical business functions continue with planned levels of interruption or essential change.⁶

Early detection

A phrase describing prompt identification of incipient or early disease and, by implication, intervention to arrest, treat, and cure it in a timely manner; and the early detection of environmental, social, and behavioural hazards to health.²

Emergency

A situation or an impending situation that constitutes a danger of major proportions that could result in serious harm to persons or substantial damage to property and that is caused by the forces of nature, a disease or other health risk, an accident or an act whether intentional or otherwise.⁷

Emergency preparedness

Emergency preparedness entails actions taken prior to an emergency or disaster to ensure an effective response.⁸

Environment

The setting and conditions in which events occur. The total of all influences health apart from genes, including economic, social, behavioural, cultural and physical factors.⁹

Physical environment

The physical, chemical, and biological factors that affect health within the home, neighbourhood, and/or workplace, which are beyond the immediate control of the individual. Among the most important factors will be air and water quality, waste management (domestic, industrial, hazardous, toxic), other sources of harmful substances (such as heavy metals and persistent chemicals), radiation, housing and other buildings, open spaces, natural or wild areas, global structures, and natural phenomena (such as ozone layer and carbon cycle).¹⁰

Supportive environments

The term supportive environments refers to both the physical and the social aspects of one's surroundings. It encompasses where people live, their local community, their home and where they work and play. Action to create supportive environments has many dimensions: physical, social, spiritual, economic and political. Each of these dimensions is inextricably linked to the others in a dynamic interaction.¹¹

Environmental health

The branch of public health science and practice concerned with a range of environmental determinants of health, i.e., the physical, chemical, biological, social and behavioural factors in the environment that influence health and disease occurrence. Examples of diseases of environmental and occupational origin include smog-related bronchitis, occupational related cancers, lead poisoning, and radiation sickness. A large component of environmental health is occupational health/medicine, which is a specialized field of public health science and practice that often involves clinical work.²

Epidemiology

The study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events in specified populations and the application of this study to control of health problems.²

Food-borne disease

A class of diseases attributable to the contamination of food by disease agents, such as pathogenic organisms and their toxins.²

Food handlers

This designation describes the occupational group engaged in every phase of the food industry, from primary production and food processing to distribution, preparation, cooking, and serving of food.⁹

Food premises

Encompass premises where food or milk is manufactured, processed, prepared, stored, handled, displayed, distributed, transported, sold or offered for sale, but does not include a private residence.¹²

Harm reduction strategies

Harm reduction is any program or policy designed to reduce drug-related harm without requiring the cessation of drug use. Interventions may be targeted at the individual, the family, community or society. Not all interventions intended to minimize the adverse consequences of substance use are harm reduction. Harm reduction programs and policies must demonstrate that they have the desired impact without producing unacceptable unintended consequences. If its evaluation reveals no support for the reduction of specified adverse consequences, or shows the unintended consequences are too serious, the program should not be considered part of a harm reduction approach and other alternatives should be developed. The primary focus of harm reduction is on people who are already experiencing some harm due to their substance use. Interventions are geared to movement from more to less harm. Examples of proven harm reduction programs are: server intervention programs which decrease public drunkenness; needle and syringe exchange programs which prevent the transmission of HIV among injection drug users; and, environmental controls on tobacco smoking which limit the exposure to second hand smoke.¹³

Hazard identification

The process of defining and describing a hazard, including its physical characteristics, magnitude and severity, probability and frequency, causative factors, and locations/areas affected.⁸

Health behaviour

The actions people undertake that influence their health status. These actions are influenced by the combination of understanding, insight, beliefs, practices that define the patterns of actions that influence people's health status, and may promote, preserve, and protect good health, , or if aspects of behaviour are harmful, such as driving cars at

excessive speed, unsafe work practices, or cigarette smoking, may lead to injury, death, or chronic disease.²

Health hazard

A condition of a premise; a substance, thing, plant or animal other than man; or a solid, liquid, gas or combination of any of these, that has or that is likely to have an adverse effect on the health of any person.¹²

Health inequalities and inequities

Health inequalities can be defined as differences in health status or in the distribution of health determinants between different population groups. For example, differences in mobility between elderly people and younger populations or differences in mortality rates between people from different social classes. It is important to distinguish between inequality in health and inequity. Some health inequalities are attributable to biological variations or free choice, and others are attributable to the external environment and conditions mainly outside the control of the individuals concerned. In the first case it may be impossible or ethically or ideologically unacceptable to change the health determinants, and so the health inequalities are unavoidable. In the second, the uneven distribution may be unnecessary and avoidable as well as unjust and unfair, so that the resulting health inequalities also lead to inequity in health.¹⁴

Health promotion

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. To reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is therefore, seen as a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy life-styles to well-being.¹⁵

Health protection

A useful term to describe important activities of public health units/departments, especially in food hygiene, water purification, environmental sanitation, drug safety, and other activities in which the emphasis is on actions that can be taken to eliminate as far as possible the risk of adverse consequences for health attributable to environmental hazard, unsafe or impure food, water, drugs, etc.²

Healthy eating

Healthy eating can be defined as eating practices and behaviours that are consistent with improving, maintaining, and/or enhancing health.¹⁶

Healthy environments

Healthy environments entails the promotion of healthy and safe living, working and recreational environments by reducing the harm caused by tobacco, alcohol, controlled substances, environmental contaminants, and unsafe consumer and industrial products.¹⁷

Healthy public policy

Healthy public policy is characterized by an explicit concern for health and equity in all areas of policy and by an accountability for health impact. The main aim of health public policy is to create a supportive environment to enable people to lead healthy lives. Such a policy makes health choices possible or easier for citizens. It makes social and physical environments health-enhancing. In the pursuit of healthy public policy, government sectors concerned with agriculture, trade, education, industry, and communications need to take into account health as an essential factor when formulating policy. These sectors should be accountable for the health consequences of their policy decisions. They should pay as much attention to health as to economic considerations.¹⁸

Healthy weights

Healthy weights entails promoting healthy eating (as opposed to dieting) and regular physical activity. A healthy weight approach promotes physical, social and psychological well-being.¹⁹

Incidence

In epidemiology, incidence refers to the occurrence of new events or cases. This is expressed as an absolute number or as a rate when the population at risk is known or can be reliably estimated and related to a specified period of time, so incidence rate – number of new cases in a specified period / person-time at risk in this period. More loosely, as in many vital statistical measures, the average or mean population at risk during the period is commonly used as the denominator. A multiplier, 10, is used to produce a rate that is a whole number rather than a decimal fraction.²

Incident management system

The combination of facilities, equipment, staff, operation procedures, and communications operation within a common organizational structure with responsibility for the management of assigned resources to effectively respond to an incident or emergency/disaster.⁸

Indicator

A measurement that reflects the status of a system. Indicators reveal the direction of a system (a community, the economy, the environment), whether it is going forward or backward, increasing or decreasing, improving or deteriorating, or staying the same.²⁰

Injury

An injury is the physical damage that results when a human body is suddenly subjected to energy in amounts that exceed the threshold of physiological tolerance, or from lack of one or more vital elements (for example, oxygen). The energy could be mechanical, thermal, chemical, or radiant. Injuries further defined by whether they are intentional or unintentional.²¹

Monitoring

The intermittent performance and analysis of routine measurements aimed at detecting changes in the environment or in the health status of populations.⁹

Network

A grouping of individuals, organizations and agencies organized on a non- hierarchical basis around common issues or concerns, which are pursued proactively and systematically, based on commitment and trust.²²

Outbreak

A small localized cluster of cases of a condition, usually an infectious disease.⁹

Population health

Population health is the health of the population, measured by health status indicators. Population health is influenced by physical, biological, behavioural, social, cultural, economic, and other factors. The term is also used to refer to the prevailing health level of the population, or a specified subset of the population, or the level to which the population aspires. Population health describes the state of health, and public health is the range of practices, procedures, methods, institutions and disciplines required to achieve it. The term also is used to describe the academic disciplines involved in studies of determinants and dynamics of health status of the population.²

Positive parenting

Positive Parenting is the approach to parenting that supports all aspects of healthy child development. It is based on decades of research into the links between parenting and how young children respond to life's challenges. A positive parent is a loving, understanding, reasonable and protective teacher and model.²³

Prevention

Policies and actions to eliminate a disease or minimize its effect; to reduce the incidence and/or prevalence of disease, disability, and premature death; to reduce the prevalence of disease precursors and risk factors in the population; if none of these if feasible, to retard the progress of incurable diseases.²

Primary prevention

Primary prevention includes protection from effects of exposure to a disease agent, e.g., vaccination against infectious pathogens.²

Recreational water

A body of water, such as a swimming pool, spa, wading pool, beach, or lake that is used for sport, exercise, or pleasure.⁹

Resiliency

The capability of individuals and systems (families, groups and communities) to cope with significant adversity or stress in ways that are not only effective, but tend to result in an increased ability to constructively respond to future adversity.²⁴

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is a quantitative and/or qualitative estimation of the likelihood that an outcome, such as an adverse effect, will result from exposure to a specified hazard or hazards, or from the absence of protective or beneficial factors. Risk assessment is an integral part of health policy.²

Risk communication

Risk communication is an interactive process of exchange of information and opinions among individuals, groups, and institutions concerning a risk to human health or the environment. It involves communicating about the probability of risk and the nature of the risk, with knowledge of how people make choices under conditions of risk. Effective risk communication attends to both message content and delivery.⁹

Risk factor

A term first used in the 1950s in reports of results from the Framingham Study of heart disease, meaning an aspect of behaviour or way of living, such as habitual patterns of diet, exercise, use of cigarettes and alcohol, etc., or a biological characteristic, genetic trait, or a health-related condition or environmental exposure with predictable effects on the risk of disease due to a specific cause, including in particular increased likelihood of an unfavourable outcome. Other meanings have been given to this term, such as determinants of diseases that can be modified by specific actions, behaviours, or treatment regimens. Risk factors may be divided into those directly related to disease outcomes (proximal risk factors), such as nonuse of seat belts and risk of injury in automobile crashes, and those with indirect effect on outcomes (distal risk factors). An example of the latter is the influence of ozone-destroying substances, such as CFCs, on the risk of malignant melanoma, mediated by increased exposure to solar ultraviolet radiation because of depletion of protective stratospheric ozone.²

Screening

Screening entails health tests, examinations or other procedures which are used to identify disease, developmental issues, or health defects among a given population. A screening test is not intended to be diagnostic. Persons with positive or suspicious findings must be referred to their medical professionals for diagnosis and necessary treatment.²⁵

Secondary prevention

Secondary prevention includes the use of screening tests or other suitable procedures to detect serious disease as early as possible so that its progress can be arrested and, if possible, the disease eradicated.²

Sexual health

Part of one's overall health and well-being that integrates the emotional, physical, cognitive and social aspects of sexuality. Attitudes about sexuality and the ability to understand and accept one's own sexuality are essential aspects of sexual health.²⁶

Healthy sexuality

Involves much more than avoiding negative outcomes, such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies. It involves acquiring the skills, knowledge and behaviours to maintain good sexual and reproductive health throughout life.²⁶

Situational assessment

A situational assessment influences planning in significant ways by examining the legal and political environment, stakeholders, the health needs of the population, the literature and previous evaluations, as well as the overall vision for the project. The phrase "situational assessment" is now used rather than the previous term "needs assessment". This is intentional. The new terminology is used as a way to avoid the common pitfall of only looking at problems and difficulties. Instead it encourages considering the strengths of and opportunities for individuals and communities. In a health promotion context, this also means looking at socio-environmental conditions and broader determinants of health.²⁷

Substance misuse

The use of a substance for a purpose that is not consistent with legal or medical guidelines.²⁸

Surveillance

Surveillance is the systematic and ongoing collection, collation, and analysis of health-related information that is communicated in a timely manner to all who need to know, so that action can be taken. Surveillance contributes to effective public health program planning, delivery, and management. Dissemination of surveillance analyses may take the form of reports, advisories, healthy public policy recommendations, alerts, or warnings. Surveillance has historically been associated with infectious diseases and vaccination programs, but its importance has become increasingly recognized for environmental health issues, child health, reproductive health, chronic disease prevention, and injury prevention.²⁹

Water-borne illness

A miscellaneous group of communicable diseases transmitted in water that has been contaminated by pathogens of viral, bacterial, protozoan and helminthic origin. Chemicals toxins such as arsenic and heavy metals can also cause water-borne illness.⁹

Water quality, drinking

Water fit for drinking, which must be free of pathogens, toxic chemicals, and excessive or harmful concentrations of dissolved salts.⁹

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