

## HEALTHY PEOPLE BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES



### Inside Story: Halting the Spread of Disease in Kansas

When a restaurant worker was diagnosed with a serious infectious disease, public health officials moved quickly to contain the impact. Messages were delivered to the media within a few hours. The public learned who was affected and what to do to prevent the disease from spreading. Once this rapid response succeeded in containing the outbreak, public health officials focused on prevention. For example, restaurant workers were offered educational classes, and at the State Fair, disposable hand washing stations were set up to encourage the public to wash before handling food.

## Identifying Today's Urgent, Emerging, and Everyday Health Problems

Health threats come in many forms: short-term and chronic, urgent and everyday. Before a health issue makes news, public health professionals in Kansas will be involved in tracking it to reduce its impact on residents. Whether it's a potential pandemic such as bird flu, an outbreak of hepatitis A, or growing concern about children's physical activity, public health professionals in Kansas proactively monitor the health of the people of our state.

### Ready to Respond

To stay on top of potential threats, public health professionals use health tracking systems to identify trends early at the local level, state-wide, and nationally when necessary. Health tracking data is analyzed and public health professionals can then decide what resources and action are necessary to respond rapidly. Once a potential health problem is identified, healthcare providers and the public are informed to watch for particular groupings of symptoms so any new problems can be found quickly, and health teams can take appropriate action.

Public health professionals use strong relationships, built over time, with partners in business, health care, schools, and faith-based organizations to educate the public about specific steps they can take to protect health.

### Action and Education to Keep Kansans Healthy

To protect health, public health professionals use active monitoring and assessment, fast action to limit new problems, plus education and policies to promote healthy practices and lifestyles. Public health professionals know that healthy people build strong communities and that their work plays an important role in a healthy and strong Kansas.

This information made possible through the Public Health Systems Group, a coalition of Kansas public health, government, academic and charitable institutions that works to protect and promote the health of Kansans.

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### Inside Story: Promoting Nutrition and Fitness in Kansas

Several years ago, public health professionals observed alarming trends in children's fitness. They pulled together key partners including pediatricians, school officials, parents, and community leaders to look for ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity. When they learned that one of the barriers to physical activity was a lack of safe places for kids, parents, and adults to be active, public health professionals used their state and local relationships to build partnerships to bring in dollars that communities are using to build new recreation facilities.

## Assessing Health Problems and Promoting Wellness

Health is so much more than the absence of disease. Promoting lifelong wellness is a priority for public health professionals in Kansas. In addition to assessing health problems, public health professionals play a key role in helping develop policies and promoting practices that foster healthy people and communities.

### Watching the Big Picture of Health in Kansas

Local health departments are your “community’s doctor.” By monitoring and analyzing health trends, public health professionals watch the “big picture” of health in Kansas, and work with local leaders to help them identify and choose health priorities for their own communities.

Healthcare costs are a major concern for many Kansans, and wellness programs hold the promise of reducing healthcare costs. When businesses and families spend less on healthcare they have more money to spend in Kansas communities. Public health professionals work hand-in-hand with employers and communities to support health promotion and wellness activities — creating more vibrant and solid Kansas communities.

Public health agencies foster, fund, and spur the creation of community-based partnerships. Through these wellness partnerships, schools work with parents to increase their family’s physical activity and improve nutrition. City planners are now planning for more sidewalks so kids can walk or ride bikes to school. Local communities have sponsored walking groups to encourage both physical activity and closer community connections. And monthly community health screening clinics have coached people on adopting healthy habits. Together, these activities create healthy places to live, and promote lifelong health.

### Watching the Big Picture of Health in Kansas

Healthy people, day by day, build and preserve strong communities in Kansas. Healthy communities are a key building block for a healthier and stronger Kansas, and building health is a key role of public health professionals and their government agencies.

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### Inside Story: Taking Action for Pandemic Readiness

Behind the scenes, public health professionals in Kansas have been developing action plans to minimize the impact and control the spread of a pandemic flu outbreak. For “bird flu” planning, they have reached out to new partners including the Departments of Agriculture and Animal Health, and the Wildlife and Parks Department. Workgroups meet monthly to focus on children’s health, vaccine delivery, and health systems to treat people who become ill. Readiness for this type of threat — as with the threat of bioterrorism or mumps or any other outbreak — involves both advanced technology systems and the human know-how to act wisely on technical data.

## Working Together to Protect Health and Control Costs

Public health professionals often play a crucial behind-the-scenes role in preparing for, and responding to, public health challenges. As leaders for community cooperation, public health brings together traditional health care partners (such as hospitals and health care providers), public safety partners (including police, firefighters, and homeland security), and community partners (including schools, civic and faith-based organizations, and businesses). When communities, businesses, policy makers, and public health agencies are working together, there is widespread input and support for implementing important safeguards to protect health and ensure safety.

### Strong Partnerships for Active Response

In public health, planning goes well beyond the public health department to include businesses, schools, communities, and emergency response. It is important to have good working relationships before there is a problem. Public health plays a key role in bringing partners together and working through issues before emergencies happen. These community groups work together on a wide range of topics to strengthen community health including plans to prevent and respond to health threats, and regional relationships that encourage sharing information and coordinating activities between counties.

Health problems can interrupt lives. Whether working to prevent everyday illnesses or planning for a possible epidemic, public health professionals work to minimize the number of people who get sick, and the disruption this causes in people’s lives, families, communities and even the economy. When the impact is contained, costs can be controlled.

### Advancing Opportunities to be Healthy

By helping Kansans be prepared, public health professionals give everybody an opportunity to prevent illness and disabilities and also to stay healthy and live longer. And, healthy people build strong communities.

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## Safeguarding Community Health and Safety

Public health professionals are charged with guarding the health and safety of the community. In this role they educate communities, businesses, and the public about practices that protect health and ensure safety and sometimes enforce laws and practices that have been put in place to protect people from illness and injury.

### Smart Strategies and Fast Action

Many public health activities focus on preventing health problems before they ever happen. At other times, public health professionals must enforce laws and policies, such as protecting people from a highly infectious disease. In these cases, laws are designed to prevent the spread of the outbreaks. Kansas public health agencies work hand-in-hand with businesses and communities to implement health laws and minimize further disruption to businesses, schools, and communities.

Safeguarding community health means acting quickly to assess the potential impact of a health threat, limit new problems, and prevent future outbreaks. Public health professionals play a crucial role, mobilizing partners in schools, childcare settings, businesses, and health care to ensure that the public is aware of the health threat and how to prevent it from being a risk to them. Messages also reinforce the importance of everyday prevention practices like washing hands before handling food and using good hygiene practices when using swimming pools.

Education plays a key role in self-enforcement of everyday prevention practices. When needed, public health professionals use appeals to the public interest to encourage affected communities and businesses to comply with laws and policies. If reminders about the importance of prevention don't prevail, public health agencies have the ability to implement laws and regulations necessary to safeguard health.

### Public Health: A Partner in Prevention

Public health professionals create strong partnerships to protect and promote health — partnerships that recognize the roles and responsibilities of individuals, businesses and communities in building a strong and healthy Kansas.

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#### Inside Story: Strengthening Partnerships for Safe Recreation

When community swimming pools were closed after the recent outbreak of a dangerous germ, public health officials worked quickly to determine the extent of the outbreak and communicate a clear strategy to prevent the spread of the germ. Where previously there had been no guidelines on when to close a pool, public health professionals worked with the community to develop a plan and policies to respond should there be a future outbreak. The plan included recommendations for swimming pool operators and swimmers to provide education and to help them develop action plans to keep facilities open by promoting safe and healthy pools as well as responsible swimming behaviors.