THIS IS GOVERNMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH

Facilitator Guide



This is Governmental Public Health (TIGPH) Instructional Materials

This facilitator guide is for instructors in schools and programs of public health who are teaching students about governmental public health as a core domain of public health practice.

This guide is designed to:

- Clarify what governmental public health is within the broader public health system
- Explain how law and regulation, governmental structure, funding and requirements, oversight, and relationships shape governmental public health practice
- Contextualize the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, Tribal, local, and territorial governments in public health
- Support instruction using applied, real-world examples of governmental public health practice

This guide supports instructors in helping students understand what governmental public health is, what federal, state, Tribal, local, and territorial (STLT) governmental public health agencies and entities do, and how governmental structures, responsibilities, and relationships shape public health practice.

CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ASPPH

Governmental Public Health in Context

What is Governmental Public Health?

Governmental public health is the work carried out by federal, state, Tribal, local, and territorial (STLT) governments to protect and improve the public's health. Federal and STLT governments contribute to this work through different governmental structures, roles, and responsibilities. STLT public health agencies are part of the broader public health system, which also includes healthcare organizations, academic institutions, businesses, and other partners (1).

STLT health departments carry out a broad range of activities that may include monitoring health and disease; investigating and responding to health threats; developing and implementing public health policies and programs; administering public health services; carrying out regulatory and compliance responsibilities; providing information and guidance; supporting public health infrastructure; and coordinating with other governmental and nongovernmental partners (1).

What distinguishes governmental public health is not any single program, service, or activity. Rather, this work occurs within governmental systems in which responsibilities and actions are shaped by law and regulation, governmental structure, funding, and oversight (1).

Key Terms for Understanding Governmental Public Health (Slide 5)

Jurisdiction: The area within which a governmental public health entity carries out its responsibilities (2).

Law: Rules and requirements established through constitutions, statutes, regulations, judicial decisions, and other legal authorities that can define, authorize, or limit governmental public health responsibilities and actions (3).

Statute: A formal written law enacted by a legislative body (4).

Regulation: A rule issued by a governmental agency, board, or commission under authority provided by law that has the force and effect of law (5).

Compliance: Meeting applicable laws, regulations, permits, or other legal requirements (6).

Enforcement: Actions taken by an authorized governmental entity to address violations of applicable laws or regulations and bring regulated entities into compliance (7).

Governance: The structures, processes, and mechanisms through which public health responsibilities are directed, coordinated, and overseen (8).

Accountability: The responsibility to answer for decisions, actions, performance, and use of resources (8).

Instructor Note: The relevance and application of these concepts vary across governmental entities and public health activities.

Why Governmental Public Health Exists (Slide 6)

Protecting the public's health requires organized and sustained action that extends beyond what individuals or individual organizations can accomplish on their own. Communities depend on systems that monitor and respond to disease and other health threats, help keep food and water safe, prepare for emergencies, support prevention, and maintain the infrastructure needed to carry out public health activities (1).

Government has a distinct role in this work. Through laws, policies, regulations, programs, funding, information, infrastructure, and coordination, governments can organize and sustain public health activities that protect the public's health (1). Some governmental public health entities also have regulatory responsibilities that may include licensing, inspections, monitoring compliance with health and safety requirements, and taking other actions authorized by law (1).

Government does not carry out this work alone. Protecting the public's health depends on collaboration among governmental agencies with healthcare organizations, community organizations, academic institutions, businesses, and other partners (1).

Instructor note: Governmental public health is distinct because public health work takes place within governmental systems with defined responsibilities, structures, resources, and, in some areas, regulatory responsibilities. These responsibilities are not uniform. What a particular governmental entity is responsible for, and what it is permitted or required to do, is shaped by applicable law, governmental structure, jurisdiction, and the public health issue involved (1).

Governmental Roles in Public Health (Slide 7)

In the United States, public health roles and responsibilities are distributed across federal and STLT governments. Roles may be distinct, shared, or overlapping, and effective public health action frequently requires coordination among governmental entities (1, 9).

Federal Government
Public health responsibilities are distributed across multiple federal departments and agencies. Federal roles may include developing policies, regulations, guidance, and standards; funding public health activities; collecting and disseminating information; conducting and supporting surveillance and research; building public health capacity; carrying out regulatory responsibilities assigned to particular federal agencies; coordinating responses to health threats that cross state or national boundaries; and directly administering certain programs and services (1).

State Governments
States have broad responsibilities for protecting the public's health, although the organization of public health and the division of responsibilities between state and local governments vary considerably. State roles may include surveillance and disease investigation; public health programs and services; public health laboratories; regulatory activities such as licensing and inspections; administration and distribution of funding; support for local public health capacity; and statewide preparedness and response (1).

Tribal Governments
Tribal Nations are sovereign governments with inherent powers of self-government. Tribal governmental public health structures and responsibilities vary across Tribal Nations. Depending on the Tribe, health programs and services may be provided directly by the Indian Health Service (IHS), administered by a Tribe or Tribal organization through self-determination contracts, or operated by a Tribe through self-governance compacts. These arrangements reflect the distinct government-to-government relationship between Tribal Nations and the federal government and Tribal Nations' exercise of sovereignty and self-determination (10, 11).

Local Governments
The organization, structure, and responsibilities of local public health vary substantially across the United States. Depending on state and local law and governmental structure, local roles may include monitoring health and disease; investigating health threats; providing public health programs and services; conducting inspections, licensing, and other regulatory activities; supporting compliance with health and safety requirements; and preparing for and responding to public health emergencies (1).

Territorial Governments
Territorial health departments protect and promote the health of their communities through public health activities that may include disease surveillance and investigation, disease prevention and control, vaccination, environmental health activities, and emergency preparedness and response. Their specific responsibilities and authorities vary by jurisdiction and applicable laws and regulations (9).

Instructor Note: The examples above illustrate common governmental public health roles; they are not universal assignments of responsibility. Do not present federal, state, Tribal, local, and territorial governments as a simple hierarchy. Responsibilities differ across and within governmental systems based on applicable law, governmental structure, jurisdiction, funding, and the public health issue involved. Responsibilities may also be shared or overlapping, making coordination among governmental entities an essential part of public health practice.

This is Governmental Public Health: Core Functions (Slides 8-9)

STLT governmental public health agencies carry out interconnected functions to protect and improve the public's health. The specific activities and responsibilities of an agency vary based on its governmental role, applicable law and regulation, organizational structure, funding, and other requirements (1).

The TIGPH Core Functions below provide an instructional framework for understanding common areas of governmental public health practice. They are interconnected and may be carried out differently across governmental entities.

1 Assess and Monitor Health and Health Threats

Governmental public health collects, analyzes, interprets, and communicates information to understand health conditions, identify health threats, and inform action (1).

Operationally, this work may involve:

- Maintaining and using surveillance systems
- Investigating diseases and other health threats
- Collecting and analyzing health data
- Operating or working with public health laboratories
- Identifying emerging health concerns
- Sharing information with governmental and nongovernmental partners

2 Prevent Disease and Injury and Protect the Public's Health

Governmental public health works to prevent disease and injury and protects the public's health through programs, services, information and education, environmental health activities, and, where applicable, regulatory responsibilities (1).

Operationally, this work may involve:

- Implementing disease and injury prevention initiatives
- Providing public health information and education
- Supporting immunization programs
- Administering public health programs and services
- Conducting environmental health activities
- Carrying out regulatory activities (e.g., licensing and inspections)

Instructor Note: Regulatory responsibilities vary by governmental entity. Regulation, compliance, and enforcement are related but are not interchangeable. Enforcement is one potential component of regulatory work when authorized by applicable law; it does not characterize governmental public health as a whole (1, 5-7).

3 Develop and Implement Public Health Policy and Programs

Governmental public health contributes to the development, administration, and implementation of policies and programs intended to protect and improve the public's health. Their specific roles and responsibilities vary across governmental entities (1).

Operationally, this work may involve:

- Providing data and scientific information to inform decisions
- Monitoring and evaluating programs and policies
- Developing regulations when authorized
- Developing and implementing public health priorities and programs
- Developing and communicating public health guidance
- Translating laws, policies, and requirements into program operations
- Administering funding and program requirements

4 Coordinate Public Health Action

Protecting the public's health frequently requires coordination among governmental entities and collaboration with organizations and sectors outside government. Governmental public health facilitates communication, coordination, and collaborative action across the broader public health system (1).

Operationally, this work may involve:

- Coordinating among federal, state, Tribal, local, and territorial governmental entities
- Sharing information and clarifying roles and responsibilities
- Participating in interagency planning and response
- Coordinating activities when responsibilities cross organizational or jurisdictional boundaries
- Establishing shared protocols and communication processes
- Coordinating with healthcare, emergency management, community organizations, and other partners

5 Maintain Public Health Infrastructure and Readiness

Governmental public health depends on sustained infrastructure and organizational capacity to carry out routine responsibilities and prepare for and respond to public health threats and emergencies (1).

Operationally, this work may involve:

- Maintaining surveillance, laboratory, data, and information systems
- Developing preparedness and response plans
- Conducting preparedness exercises
- Maintaining continuity of operations
- Managing funding, staffing, and other resources
- Providing technical assistance and capacity-building support
- Developing and supporting the public health workforce
- Monitoring emerging threats and maintaining response capabilities

How the Core Functions Are Carried Out

Across the core functions, governmental public health works within regulatory structures that shape their responsibilities and activities. Applicable laws and regulations, governmental structure, funding and other requirements, oversight, and relationships with other governmental and nongovernmental entities influence how governmental public health work is carried out (1).

These factors differ across governmental entities. Responsibilities may be distinct, shared, or overlapping. Understanding governmental public health therefore requires attention to both what a governmental public health entity does and to the governmental context in which that work occurs (1).

How to Use This Guide in Academic Settings

In academic instruction, this guide helps students understand governmental public health as a distinct area of public health practice. Students may be familiar with specific public health programs, services, or professions without understanding how governmental responsibilities, structures, and relationships shape that work.

This guide helps instructors connect what governmental public health entities do with the governmental context in which they operate. Students should learn to consider not only the public health activity itself, but also which governmental entity is responsible, what shapes that responsibility, which other governmental and nongovernmental partners are involved, and how the work is coordinated.

This guide also introduces students to concepts such as law, regulation, jurisdiction, governance, compliance, and accountability so they can recognize how these concepts apply differently across governmental entities and areas of public health practice.

This content can be adapted for undergraduate and graduate instruction in schools and programs of public health and related disciplines. It can be used to build foundational understanding before students encounter governmental public health through coursework, applied learning, or professional practice.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL FLOW

1. Define governmental public health within the broader system
2. Introduce key concepts that shape governmental public health practice
3. Explain why governmental public health exists
4. Examine governmental roles and responsibilities
5. Introduce the TIGPH Core Functions
6. Examine what shapes how governmental public health work is carried out
7. Connect governmental public health practice to workforce roles

Throughout instruction, reinforce that governmental public health responsibilities vary across governmental entities and may be distinct, shared, or overlapping.

SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Activity 1: Core Function Identification
Students match real-world examples to TIGPH core functions.

Debrief: Which core functions are represented? What governmental responsibilities, structures, or requirements shape how the work is carried out?

Activity 2: Governmental Roles and Coordination Mapping
Students identify the governmental entities and nongovernmental partners involved in a public health scenario and map their respective roles and responsibilities.

Debrief: How are responsibilities distributed? Where are responsibilities distinct, shared, or overlapping? How is action coordinated?

Implementation in Schools and Programs of Public Health

The TIGPH slide deck and instructional materials are adaptable throughout academic spaces, including:

Single or multi-week modules in public health courses, including:
- Introduction to Governmental Public Health
- Applied Governmental Public Health Practice
- Systems Thinking in Governmental Public Health
- Governmental Public Health: Policy, Systems, and Leadership

Guest lectures, seminars, and grand rounds

Applied learning intensives or capstone preparation sessions

Localizing Instruction

Instructors may incorporate local context to strengthen students' understanding of governmental public health in practice, including:
- Community health data and dashboards
- Health department organizational structures
- Governance and funding processes

Suggested prompt: Which core functions are visible? Which governmental entities are involved, and what shapes their roles and responsibilities?

Instructional Support: Practice-Based Perspectives

Because governmental public health responsibilities and practice vary across governmental settings, instructors are encouraged to incorporate practitioner perspectives.

Suggested prompts:
- What are your organization's primary public health responsibilities?
- What laws, regulations, policies, funding requirements, or other factors shape your work?
- Which governmental and nongovernmental partners do you work with, and how do you coordinate?

Toolkit Components – Instructional Materials for This is Governmental Public Health

The TIGPH toolkit is structured to help instructors teach governmental public health practice in a way that is conceptually clear, grounded in real-world systems, and aligned with the CEPH MPH Foundational Competencies.

Student-Facing Instructional Slides

The slide deck is designed to build shared vocabulary and conceptual clarity around governmental public health practice. It helps students understand governmental public health within the broader public health system and recognize how governmental structures, responsibilities, and relationships shape that work.

Instructional Emphasis

When facilitating instruction on governmental public health, instructors should prioritize applied systems understanding over descriptive or program-specific detail.

Emphasize that governmental public health includes a broad range of activities carried out within governmental systems. What STLT governmental public health agencies and entities do, and how they do it, varies based on their responsibilities, applicable law and regulation, jurisdiction, governance, funding, organizational structure, and relationships with other governmental and nongovernmental entities.
Instructors should:

- Reinforce the distinction between governmental public health and the broader public health system. STLT governmental agencies and entities are central to public health, but they work alongside healthcare organizations, academic institutions, businesses, community organizations, and other partners.
- Help students understand the roles of federal, state, Tribal, local, and territorial governments without presenting them as a simple hierarchy. Responsibilities vary and may be distinct, shared, or overlapping.
- Introduce law, regulation, jurisdiction, governance, compliance, and accountability as related but distinct concepts that shape governmental public health practice differently depending on the governmental entity and activity involved.
- Use the TIGPH Core Functions to connect concepts to practice: assessing and monitoring health and health threats; preventing disease and injury; developing and implementing public health policy and programs; coordinating public health action; and maintaining public health infrastructure and readiness.
- Use real-world examples to show how governmental responsibilities are carried out in practice and how the same public health issue may involve multiple governmental entities and nongovernmental partners.
- Connect governmental public health functions to workforce roles so students can see how different professions contribute to governmental public health practice.
- Encourage students to ask who is responsible, what shapes that responsibility, who else is involved, and how the work is coordinated.

Effective instruction should continually reconnect students to the central question:

Who is responsible for protecting the public's health, what shapes those responsibilities, and how do governmental and nongovernmental partners work together to carry them out?

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