
Academy *for* Science & Freedom

Statement on the Ethical Principles of Public Health, on behalf of Hillsdale College's Academy for Science and Freedom

Washington, D.C.

August 23, 2022

During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, fundamental principles of public health were ignored, and, as a result, trust in public health has been damaged. As experts in public health, medical science, ethics, and health policy, we propose the following ten principles to guide public health officials and scientists, in order to ensure the credibility of public health recommendations and to help restore public trust.



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Ethical Principles of Public Health

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- 1 All public health advice should consider the impact on overall health, rather than solely be concerned with a single disease. It should always consider both benefits and harms from public health measures and weigh short-term gains against long-term harms.
- 2 Public health is about everyone. Any public health policy must first and foremost protect society's most vulnerable, including children, low-income families, persons with disabilities and the elderly. It should never shift the burden of disease from the affluent to the less affluent.
- 3 Public health advice should be adapted to the needs of each population, within cultural, religious, geographic, and other contexts.
- 4 Public health is about comparative risk evaluations, risk reduction, and reducing uncertainties using the best available evidence, since risk usually cannot be entirely eliminated.
- 5 Public health requires public trust. Public health recommendations should present facts as the basis for guidance, and never employ fear or shame to sway or manipulate the public.
- 6 Medical interventions should not be forced or coerced upon a population, but rather should be voluntary and based on informed consent. Public health officials are advisors, not rule setters, and provide information and resources for individuals to make informed decisions.
- 7 Public health authorities must be honest and transparent, both with what is known and what is not known. Advice should be evidence-based and explained by data, and authorities must acknowledge errors or changes in evidence as soon as they are made aware of them.
- 8 Public health scientists and practitioners should avoid conflicts-of-interest, and any unavoidable conflicts-of-interest must be clearly stated.
- 9 In public health, open civilized debate is profoundly important. It is unacceptable for public health professionals to censor, silence or intimidate members of the public or other public health scientists or practitioners.
- 10 It is critical for public health scientists and practitioners always to listen to the public, who are living the public health consequences of public health decisions, and to adapt appropriately.

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