

PUBLIC HEALTH ETHICS

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Introduction

- Focuses on populations rather than individuals
- Balances individual rights with collective good
- Interdisciplinary: combines ethics, law, public policy, and health
- Example: Mandatory vaccination during epidemics



Why Ethics in Public Health Matters

- Protects vulnerable groups
- Ensures fairness in resource allocation
- Guides response during public health emergencies
- Builds public trust and accountability



Core Ethical Principles in Public Health

- **Respect for persons** – dignity, autonomy
- **Beneficence** – doing good
- **Non-maleficence** – avoid harm
- **Justice** – fairness, equity
- **Solidarity** – shared responsibility
- **Reciprocity** – support for those at risk



Public Health vs. Clinical Ethics

Clinical Ethics

Individual focus

Patient autonomy

Confidentiality

Informed consent

Public health ethics

population focus

community well-being

surveillance, data sharing

sometimes overridden for public good

Ethical Frameworks in Public Health

- **Childress et al. (2002) Justificatory Conditions:**
- **Effectiveness:** Does the intervention achieve its goals?
- **Least Infringement:** Are there less intrusive options?
- **Necessity:** Is the intervention essential for public health?
- **Proportionality:** Do the benefits outweigh the harms?
- **Public Justification:** Is the rationale transparent and acceptable?

COVID-19

- Ethical challenges:
- Lockdowns vs. freedom of movement
- Vaccine mandates and equity
- Contact tracing and privacy
- Global disparity in vaccine access



Common Ethical Dilemmas

- Quarantine and isolation
- Health resource allocation (e.g., ICU beds)
- Surveillance vs. privacy
- Risk communication and transparency
- Access to experimental treatments



Applying Ethics in Practice

- Engage communities
- Ensure transparency
- Use participatory approaches
- Monitor and evaluate ethical impacts
- Integrate ethics into policymaking and training

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