

Research Topics & Ideas: Public Health

About this document

This PDF contains 50 **public health research topics** for dissertations and theses, organized into 10 areas of public health, from environmental and occupational health to substance use and harm reduction. Each topic is written as a researchable question and linked to a completed dissertation (2022–2026, 26 universities), so you can see how it was studied in practice. Use it to shortlist public health dissertation topics and thesis ideas, then narrow one down to your own population, setting and timeframe.

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Environmental and occupational health

1. What did the Clean Water Act actually buy in health terms?

See it in a real dissertation: [Essays on Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act](#) · Sharaban Tahura Anica · West Virginia University · 2022

2. What public health threat is sitting in an urban lake nobody tests?

See it in a real dissertation: [Environmental Monitoring in Shallow Lakes: Public Health Threats in Urban Waters](#) · Kyleigh Johnson · Virginia Commonwealth University · 2026

3. Is the sand at a beach a bigger risk than the water?

See it in a real dissertation: [Escherichia coli Concentrations in Sand and Water at Tributary-Influenced Lake Michigan Beaches](#) · Josie Elaine Kuhlman · Grand Valley State University · 2026

4. How do you govern antimicrobial resistance across sectors that do not talk?

See it in a real dissertation: [Operationalising one health for antimicrobial resistance: environmental integration and collaborative governance in Scotland](#) · Anishka Cameron · University of the West of Scotland · 2026

5. How much traffic pollution are children exposed to at school?

See it in a real dissertation: [Traffic-related Pollution Exposure Assessment of Fulton County and Atlanta Public Schools \(K-12\) in Proximity to Major Highways and Expressways](#) · David Carter · Georgia State University · 2022

Global health and emergency preparedness

6. Who funds global health now, and what does that buy them?

See it in a real dissertation: [Financing Global Health Governance: The World Health Organization, the WHO Foundation, and the Shifting Landscape of Development Financing](#) · Johanny O Reyes · City College of New York · 2026

7. How ready is a hospital system for a disaster it has not had?

See it in a real dissertation: [Evaluating disaster risk management in Saudi Arabian public hospitals: perceptions and practices](#) · Shahad Ali S Alshehri · University of Southampton · 2026

8. How prepared did the public turn out to be when an outbreak arrived?

See it in a real dissertation: [Understanding public emergency preparedness before and during the coronavirus outbreak: implications for effective public health and risk communication](#) · Raphael Fumey · University of Louisville · 2022

9. What happens when a country tries to change its immunization schedule?

See it in a real dissertation: [Immunisation schedules: negotiating the acceptance of change in global health](#) · CL Firth · University of Oxford · 2026

10. What information does an emergency response actually need first?

See it in a real dissertation: [Building an Information Management System for Emergency Preparedness and Response to Promote Assurance: A Case Study of the Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness](#) · Judith A. Robinson · Georgia State University · 2022

Health communication and misinformation

11. What makes an influencer a credible source in a health campaign?

See it in a real dissertation: [A Mixed-Method Examination of Social Media Influencers' Source Characteristics in Sponsored Health Campaign Messaging: An Application of Psychological Reactance Theory](#) · Lauren Pick · Chapman University · 2025

12. Does a national awareness campaign change what parents actually do?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Impact of the "Learn the Signs. Act Early." Public Health Awareness Campaign on Early Intervention Behavior](#) · Kinjal Prabodh Patel · Georgia State University · 2022

13. How does mistrust translate into public health policy failure?

See it in a real dissertation: [Three Essays on Misinformation, Mistrust and their Influence on Public Health Policy](#) · Eli Kochersperger · West Virginia University · 2024

14. How does health misinformation travel from mainstream media into social feeds?

See it in a real dissertation: [Misinformation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: From Mainstream Media to Social Media](#) · Ella Frances Douglas-Durham · Harvard University · 2023

15. What could social media do for maternal health that it currently does not?

See it in a real dissertation: [Missed opportunities in social media to reduce maternal health disparities for Black women](#) · Nerissa George · University at Albany, State University of New York · 2022

Health equity and social determinants

16. Which social determinants show up first in preterm birth rates?

See it in a real dissertation: [Impact of Social Determinants of Health on Preterm Births among Black Women](#) · TaShara Coakley · Walden University · 2025

17. How much of a present-day health disparity is traceable to a historical policy?

See it in a real dissertation: [An Examination of Historical Health Disparities of the Black Population in America, and Their Effects on Contemporary Health Disparities in COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy](#) · Sophia-Evelyne Nehama · University at Albany, State University of New York · 2022

18. What did Black physicians build where the health system refused to?

See it in a real dissertation: [Leonidas: Black Physicians and Public Health in the Jim Crow North](#) · Caine Jordan · University of Chicago · 2024

19. Does an ambulance crew treat patients differently by race or language?

See it in a real dissertation: [Treatment Disparities in Emergency Medical Services: The Influence of Race/Ethnicity, Obesity, and English Proficiency](#) · Jamie Kennel · Portland State University · 2022

20. What does a rural emergency department absorb that an urban one does not?

See it in a real dissertation: [Cardiology Implications of ED COVID-19 Patients in an Underserved Rural Health Care Environment](#) · Pedro Colio · University of San Diego · 2022

Health policy and health systems

21. Did Medicaid expansion reach the states that needed it most?

See it in a real dissertation: [State Medicaid Expansion and Mental Health in the Poorest States: Examining Differences in States That Expanded Medicaid Compared to Those Which Did Not](#) · Steven Kyle Yates · University of Northern Colorado · 2026

22. What does health insurance actually change about the care people get?

See it in a real dissertation: [Three Essays in Health Insurance](#) · Chengcheng Zhang · Claremont Graduate University · 2023

23. Do health outcomes track which party controls a state?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Impact of Political Party Control on Health Outcomes in U.S. States](#) · Trevor G Samaha · West Virginia University · 2025

24. Does the type of insurance you hold change how chronic illness plays out?

See it in a real dissertation: [Chronic Illness Among Private and Public Health Insurance Holders in Adults of Poverty Status](#) · Zoe Cute · University of Rhode Island · 2023

25. What happens to health outcomes when housing is treated as health policy?

See it in a real dissertation: [Humanizing Affordable Housing: A Public Health Centered Approach to Affordable Housing](#) · Eiman Mohamed · Washington University in St. Louis · 2024

26. What public health work does the only pharmacy in a neighborhood quietly do?

See it in a real dissertation: [Keystone Pharmacies and Public Health Access in Indiana](#) · Juan Diego Viracachá Suárez · Purdue University · 2026

Infectious disease and vaccination

27. How did public sentiment about vaccines move, and what moved it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Analysis Of Public Sentiment of Covid-19 Pandemic, Vaccines, And Lockdowns](#) · D.P. Singh · San Jose State University · 2022

28. Does the quality of public information change what people believe about a vaccine?

See it in a real dissertation: [COVID-19 Vaccine Complications: Quality of Public Information and Hostile Media Effect](#) · Geoffrey Marc Miller · University of North Texas · 2024

29. What can a passive reporting system tell you, and what can it never tell you?

See it in a real dissertation: [Predictors of Reported Serious Health Outcomes and Death a After COVID-19 Vaccine in the United States](#) · Jean Amost Cadet · Walden University · 2024

30. Why did HIV fall among people who inject drugs, and what did policy have to do with it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Characterising the public health response to HIV among people who inject drugs \(PWID\): the case of Kyrgyzstan](#) · Ainura Moldokmatova · University of Oxford · 2025

31. How much does human behavior change what an epidemic model predicts?

See it in a real dissertation: [Models of COVID-19 transmission based on behavioural heterogeneity at different scales](#) · Li Pi · University of Oxford · 2025

Maternal, sexual and reproductive health

32. What reproductive health needs go unspoken in a community that does not discuss them?

See it in a real dissertation: [Sexual reproductive health of Asian Indian American women](#) · Pooja Chugh-Clayton · University at Albany, State University of New York · 2023

33. Does a provider toolkit change confidence, knowledge, or the care delivered?

See it in a real dissertation: [Evaluating an LGBTQ+ Adolescent Sexual Health Toolkit: Boosting Confidence and Provider Knowledge](#) · Joslyn Lypka · Grand Valley State University · 2026

34. How do immigration policies reach a young person's sexual health?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Impact of Immigrant-Related Social Policies and Family Environments on the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Latine Children of Immigrants](#) · Frania Mendoza Lua · University of Chicago · 2024

35. What determines whether a pregnant woman takes up malaria prevention?

See it in a real dissertation: [Malaria during pregnancy: Uptake, determinants, and maternal health outcomes of malaria prevention behaviors among pregnant women of Bioko Island in Equatorial Guinea](#) · Madysen Schreiber · Oregon Health and Science University · 2026

36. Does a mother's autonomy protect her child's nutrition?

See it in a real dissertation: [Maternal Autonomy as a Protective Factor in Child Nutritional Outcome in Tanzania](#) · Hannah Murphy Ross-Suits · Georgia State University · 2022

Mental and behavioral health in populations

37. What process turns self-stigma into distress?

See it in a real dissertation: [Toward A Process-Based Account Of Mental Health Self-Stigma And Distress: Elucidating The Contribution Of Psychological Inflexibility And Its Six Component Subprocesses](#) · Sara White · University at Albany, State University of New York · 2023

38. What does poor mental health cost, and who pays it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Essays on The Economics of Mental Health](#) · Lu Huang · University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill University · 2024

39. Do nature-based interventions work, or do the people who take them differ?

See it in a real dissertation: [Nature Based Interventions for Human Health and Wellbeing](#) · Samantha I. Moyers · West Virginia University · 2023

40. What determines whether distress becomes a service visit?

See it in a real dissertation: [Effect of Mental Distress and Functional Impairment on Mental Health Service Use by Filipino Americans in California](#) · Marieann R Brill · Walden University · 2025

41. Is it culture or the system that keeps young adults from mental health care?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Interplay of Cultural and Structural Barriers in Mental Health Service Utilization Among Chinese American Young Adults](#) · Eunseok Jeong · University of Chicago · 2026

Nutrition, food security and obesity

42. Does food insecurity leave a measurable mark on kidney function?

See it in a real dissertation: [Evaluation of the Relationship Between Albuminuria and Food Insecurity in Women, Using the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey](#) · Heidi Cox · Georgia State University · 2022

43. How does household food insecurity show up in an adolescent's mouth?

See it in a real dissertation: [Familial Income Status, Food Insecurity, and Oral Health in Adolescents in the Prepandemic Era](#) · Gersom I Jimeenz · Walden University · 2025

44. Does diet quality differ between vegans, vegetarians and people who just eat less meat?

See it in a real dissertation: [Diet Quality, Diet Motives, and Nutrition Literacy of Vegans, Vegetarians, and Semi-Vegetarians](#) · Sapna J. Peruvemba · San Jose State University · 2022

45. What does diet and activity do for quality of life after cancer treatment?

See it in a real dissertation: [Cultivating Quality of Life: Assessing Diet, Physical Activity, and Mental Health Among Arab-American Breast Cancer Survivors - Uncovering Barriers and Facilitators for Holistic Well-Being](#) · Nouf Ali Alhomaiddhi · Claremont Graduate University · 2025

46. Can prescribing vegetables work inside a food policy built for something else?

See it in a real dissertation: [Critical Perspectives on Produce Prescription Programs & US Federal Nutrition Policy](#) · Alanna K. Higgins · West Virginia University · 2022

Substance use and harm reduction

47. What does alcohol policy do to public safety that is not about drinking?

See it in a real dissertation: [Essays on Alcohol Consumption and Public Safety](#) · Tong Li · Purdue University · 2026

48. Should a health record be used to predict who will develop an opioid problem?

See it in a real dissertation: [Risk Prediction of Opioid Use Disorder \(OUD\) using Electronic Health Records](#) · Wenqiu Cao · University of Rhode Island · 2022

49. What are the measurable health consequences of adolescent vaping so far?

See it in a real dissertation: [Tobacco and Trouble: Exploring the Health Consequences of Electronic Cigarette Use in Adolescents](#) · Noor Ibrahim Abdulhay · West Virginia University · 2025

50. Where do fatal overdoses happen, and does the place differ by race?

See it in a real dissertation: [Location of Overdose Mortality Comparing American Indian/Alaska Natives To Other Races](#) · Chyla Bingham-Hendricks · University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School · 2026

How to turn a topic into your research question

A topic is a starting point, not something you can research yet. These four steps take you from a topic on this list to a focused question you can actually answer.

- 1. Shortlist three, not one.** Pick three topics from this list that genuinely interest you and fit the access you have to people and data.

Recommended reading: [How to find and choose a dissertation topic](#)

- 2. Read the dissertation behind each one.** Its literature review and its "recommendations for future research" section show you what is already known and what is still open.

Recommended reading: [How to find a research gap](#)

- 3. Narrow it to your setting.** Name one population, one setting and one thing you will measure or explore. That turns a broad topic into a question you can finish.

Recommended reading: [How to write a research question](#)

- 4. Line up your aims, objectives and questions.** Your committee will check that they agree.

Recommended reading: [Research aims, objectives and questions](#)

Work through these once and you will have a focused question rather than a broad topic, which is what the rest of your proposal is built on.