



Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

What is public health?

A formal definition was crafted by Charles-Edward A. Winslow in 1920. He defined **public health** as being:



Charles-Edward A. Winslow

"the science and art of preventing disease,
prolonging life,
promoting physical health and efficiency through organized community efforts for the sanitation of the environment,
the control of community infections,
the organization of medical and nursing service for the early diagnosis and preventive treatment of disease,
the education of the individual in principles of personal hygiene,
and the development of the social machinery which will ensure to every individual in the community a standard of living adequate for the maintenance of health."

Winslow’s definition is still relevant 100 years later, as public health focuses on safeguarding and improving the physical, mental, and social well-being of the community as a whole. To ensure this, the United States government has a [Department of Health and Human Services](#), the [Centers for Disease Control](#), and the [National Institutes of Health](#), all of which help maintain the public health.

The concept of public health is an example of John Locke's theory of **social contract** in action. A social contract is created when an organized society agrees on the relationship between the government and the people. Locke said people form governments and agree to follow the laws and rules it sets because that government protects their right to life, liberty, and property.

To Do and To Think: How is the government abiding by its end of the social contract during this public health crisis?

As a reflective exercise, keep a journal or diary that documents the ways in which you, your family, your friends, and your community are participating in the social contract to help the nation fight COVID-19/Novel Coronavirus.



John Locke

Learn MORE about the concepts of the social contract and public health. Free registration may be required.

- [The Enlightenment and Its Influence](#), from Civics360
- [Public Health Priorities](#), from the Department of Health and Human Services
- [The Enlightenment: Social Contract](#), from The Oxford Observer

