

Glossary for Terms in Public Health

Carrier

- An infected person or animal that harbours a specific infectious agent in the absence of discernible clinical disease and serves as a potential source of infection for others.

Chemoprophylaxis

- The protection from, or prevention of, disease through the administration of chemical agent.

Communicable Disease

- A disease due to a specific infectious agent or its toxic products capable of being directly or indirectly transmitted from man to man, animal to animal, or from the environment (through air, dust, soil, water, food, etc.) to man or animal

Community Diagnosis

- The identification and quantification of health problems in a community in terms of mortality and morbidity rates and ratios, and identification of their correlates for the purpose of defining those individuals or groups at risk or those in need of health care.

Contagious disease

- A disease that is transmitted through contact

Contamination

- The presence of an infectious agent on a body surface; also on or in clothes, beddings, toys, surgical instruments or dressings, or other inanimate articles or substances including water, milk and food.

Control (disease control)

- The operations aimed at reducing the incidence and duration of disease, the physical and psychological complications of disease and the financial burden of disease in a certain community.

Disinfection

- Thermal or chemical destruction of pathogen and other types of microorganisms

Elimination

- Interruption of disease transmission

Endemic

- The constant presence of usual prevalence of a disease in a given geographic area

Epidemic

- The sudden increase in the number of cases for a certain disease above what is normally expected in that population

Epidemiology

- The study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events in specified populations, and the application of this study to the control of health.

Eradication

- Termination of all modes of transmission by extermination of (destroying) the infectious agent.

Exotic disease

- A disease that is imported into a country in which it does not otherwise occur.

Herd immunity

- A type of immunity that occurs when the vaccination of a portion of population (or herd) provides protection to unprotected individuals.

Host

- A person or other animal, including birds and arthropods, that affords subsistence or lodgement to an infectious agent under natural conditions.

Illness

- The individual's perception and behavior in response to the presence of disease, and the disease's impact on the psychological environment.

Incubation period

- The time interval between invasion by an infectious agent and appearance of the first sign or symptom of the disease in question.

Infection

- The entry and development or multiplication of an infectious agent in the body of man or animals.

Infectious disease

- A clinically manifest disease of man or animals resulting from an infection

Infestation

- The lodgement, development and reproduction of arthropods on the surface of the body or in the clothing.

Latent period

- In chronic non-communicable diseases, it is the period from disease initiation to disease detection.

Nosocomial infection

- An infection originating in a patient while in a hospital or other health care facility.

Opportunistic infection

- Infection by an organism that takes the opportunity provided by a defect in host defence to infect the host and hence cause disease

Outbreak

- An epidemic that occurs in a limited geographic area (e.g. an institution, a home facility, a neighborhood, a village...). In other words, it is a localized epidemic

Pandemic

- When an epidemic spreads over several countries usually affecting a large number of people

Period of communicability

- The time during which an infectious agent may be transferred directly or indirectly from an infected person to another person, from an infected animal to man, or from an infected person to an animal, including arthropods.

Reservoir of infection

- Any person, animal, arthropod, plant, soil or substance (or combination of these) in which an infectious agent lives and multiplies, on which it depends primarily for survival, and where it reproduces itself in such manner that it can be transmitted to a susceptible host.

Risk factor

- An attribute or determinant that is significantly associated with the development of a disease. From a public health perspective, we are interested in attributes that are modifiable by intervention in order to reduce the possibility of disease occurrence.

Risk group

- A group from the population that carries certain characteristics, which increase their probability for having a disease compared to the rest of the population.

Risk Approach

- Identifying "risk groups" for a certain disease and applying directed appropriate interventions to them. This helps increase efficacy of healthcare services where there is limited resources.

Screening

- The search for unrecognized disease or defect by means of rapidly applied tests, examinations or other procedures in apparently healthy individuals.

Sickness

- A state of social dysfunction; the role that one assumes when he/she is ill.

Source of infection

- The person, animal, object or substance from which an infectious agent passes or is disseminated to the host

Sporadic

- Cases are so few and separated widely in space and time that they show little or no connection with each other, nor a recognizable common source of infection.

Sterilization

- A validated process used to render a product free of all forms of viable microorganisms including bacterial spores.

Surveillance

- The continuous scrutiny of the factors that determine the occurrence and distribution of disease and other conditions of ill-health. This involves watching over the community with great attention to observe any changes of trends of disease and be prepared for any health-related disasters that require community-wide intervention.

Zoonosis or zoonotic disease

- An infection or infectious disease transmissible under natural conditions from vertebrate animals to man.

Reference:

Park K. Park's textbook of preventive and social medicine. 23rd Edition. Jabalpur : M/S Banarsidas Bhanot, 2015.