

Public Health Milestones in Massachusetts

Public health records in the new colonies began shortly after the Pilgrims stepped onto Plymouth Rock. The rigors of their first winter brought an epidemic of respiratory infections and malnutrition diseases, and before the winter snows began to melt, half of Mayflower's passengers and crew had died. During the early days of the Federal Era, when population pressure strained community capacity to deal with sanitation and yellow fever was an annual threat, America's first board of health was established in Boston by an act of the legislature in 1799, with Paul Revere as president.

Colonial Period

- 1630** The Colonial Period began when Dr. Samuel Fuller conducted the first disease control program. Boston quickly grew to the largest city in the English colonies with many ships sailing in and out of its harbor.
- 1639** First colonial laws for registration of births and deaths.
- 1648** Ships were held at Castle Island as a temporary quarantine measure to prevent the spread of smallpox.
- 1652** First public water conduit in America.
- 1721** During the 1721 smallpox outbreak, the Rev. Cotton Mather convinced the Puritan community to have Dr. Zabdiel Boylston conduct the first large-scale smallpox inoculations in the English-speaking world. Scholars often site this as the first big step in American public health history.

Federal Era - Commonwealth of Massachusetts (1781)

There were very few physicians available during this period, and most of them were poorly educated. This led to the establishment of the Massachusetts Medical Society in 1781 and the founding of the Harvard Medical School a year later.

- 1781** Massachusetts Medical Society is established.
- 1782** Harvard Medical School is founded.
- 1785** First pure food legislation in America.
- 1797** Great Public Health Act - Law passed authorizing practitioners and householders to notify local board of health of dangerous diseases, such as smallpox.
- 1799** America's first board of health was established in Boston with Paul Revere appointed president.



Pioneering in the Nineteenth Century

- 1800** First use of smallpox vaccine (cowpox virus) in the Western Hemisphere by Benjamin Waterhouse of Cambridge.
- 1809** Law passed allowing boards of health to require vaccination against smallpox.
- 1827** Last cholera epidemic in Massachusetts.
- 1842** First statewide registration of vital statistics.
- 1846** Massachusetts General Hospital introduced to the world the use of ether anesthesia. It was administered by Dr. William T. G. Morton, a Massachusetts dentist.
- 1850** Report of Lemuel Shattuck's Sanitary Commission.
- 1863** Massachusetts Board of State Charities established, Dr. Samuel Howe, chairman.
- 1869** Massachusetts State Board of Health established, Dr. Henry I. Bowditch, chairman.
- 1871** "Offensive Trade" Act to regulate slaughtering, first executive power of Board of Health.

Growth and Order

In 1873, Linda Richards was the first woman in the United States to become a graduate nurse. 1890 saw the formation of the Massachusetts Associated Boards of Health which became the Massachusetts Public Health Association in 1936.

- 1873** Linda Richards, trained at the New England Hospital for Women and Children, first woman in America to be a graduate nurse.
- 1878** Law to prevent pollution of inland waterways.
- 1879** Merger of Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity.
- 1883** First Manual of Public Health Laws compiled.
Mandatory reporting of dangerous diseases.
- 1886** Independent State Board of Health re-established, Dr. Henry Walcott, chairman.
Beginning of annual supervision of water supplies and sewage disposal.
- 1887** Lawrence Experiment Station created for research in purification of water and sewage.
- 1890** Formation of Massachusetts Associated Boards of Health; became Massachusetts Public Health Association in 1936.
- 1891** Food and Drug Laboratory established, first of its kind in the nation.
Sanitarium in Sharon, first municipal tuberculosis sanitarium.
- 1894** State public health microbiology laboratory established.
State to produce free diphtheria antitoxin.



- 1895** Daily medical inspection of children in public schools established in Boston. Bacteriologic Laboratory services begun by Dr. Theobald Smith at Bussey Institute in Jamaica Plain.
Report of the Metropolitan Water Supply Study.
- 1898** First state sanitarium for tuberculosis patients in the nation opened at Rutland.
- 1899** W.F. Whitney's study of cancer authorized by the Board of Health.
- 1902** Last smallpox epidemic in Massachusetts.
- 1903** State authorized to produce and distribute diphtheria antitoxin and smallpox vaccine.
- 1905** Wachusett Reservoir completed Metropolitan Water System, then largest water supply in the United States.
Systematic dairy inspection began.
- 1906** School Health Law passed by legislature, first in the nation.
- 1907** State lists sixteen contagious reportable diseases, including tuberculosis.
Fifteen district health officers appointed.
- 1909** Typhoid carriers first recognized.
North Reading State Sanatorium opened.
- 1910** Smoke Abatement District established in greater Boston, first in the nation.
- 1911** Massachusetts Society for Social Hygiene founded.
- 1914** Massachusetts Department of Health created from Board of Health and its staff.
- 1915** Division of Hygiene began its educational projects and child hygiene activities.
- 1917** First state nutritionist in the nation appointed.
Framingham Community Health and Tuberculosis Demonstration of community tuberculosis control, first in the nation.
- 1918** Venereal diseases declared dangerous to public health.
Manufacture and distribution of arsphenamine for treatment of syphilis instituted, first in the nation.
First toxin-antitoxin made at the Massachusetts State Laboratory.
- 1919** Supervisor and health instructor in mouth hygiene appointed, first in the nation.
- 1920** Division of Tuberculosis and the state sanatoria join, combining control and treatment measures.
Department of Health becomes the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, now incorporating the Division of Tuberculosis and the state leprosarium on Penikese Island.



Expansion and Development

- 1924** The Chadwick Clinics for the detection of childhood tuberculosis began and became recognized as a world model.
- 1927** Hinton serologic test for syphilis, developed by William A. Hinton at the Wasserman Laboratory supplants Wasserman test.

Pondville Hospital for treatment and research in cancer opened; six cancer clinics organized and public education begun on the need for early detection of cancer.
- 1928** First shellfish purification plant in the nation established in Newburyport.
- 1938** Law passed for the prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases.
- 1940** Edwin Cohn develops plasma fractionation with the production of albumin and gamma globulin for therapeutic use.
- 1940** Massachusetts pertussis vaccine standardized for distribution.
- 1946** Blood and blood derivatives program begun at Massachusetts Biologic Laboratories, first civilian program in the nation
- 1954** Lemuel Shattuck Hospital opens in Jamaica Plain.
- 1958** Code regulating processing, storing and distribution of frozen food adopted, first in the nation.
- 1962** Mandatory PKU (phenylketonuria) screening of newborns followed in 1963 by screening for other inborn errors of metabolism.
- 1965** Two-way closed-circuit television installed at the Massachusetts Hospital School, Canton, to provide uninterrupted education for child patients, first in the world.
- 1970** Public formulary of drugs listed by both generic and brand name, first in the nation.
- 1974** New State Laboratory Institute building opens in Jamaica Plain.
- 1985** Health hazard warning required on containers of snuff sold in Massachusetts, first in the nation.
- 1986** First state law in the nation requiring immunization of college students.
- 1988** Universal health care legislation passed.

The 1990's

- 1990** Massachusetts Public Health Association makes the establishment of a Public Health Museum a Centennial Celebration project.
- 1991** Committee for the Public Health Museum establishes a Board of Directors and incorporates: The Public Health Museum in Massachusetts is the first of its kind in the nation.



- 1993** Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program begins.
- 1994** The Public Health Museum in Massachusetts, an idea conceived in 1970 becomes reality. Doors open in September 1994 at the Tewksbury Hospital Old Administration Building.
- 1995** First state in the nation to divest state pensions from tobacco stock legislatively.
- 1996** First state law in the nation requiring disclosure of cigarette additives and a more accurate method for reporting nicotine yield.
- 1996** First state law to regulate firearms as a consumer product. The regulations were implemented in 2000 after the firearms manufacturers were defeated in court.
- First state-wide system for reporting medication occurrences in community residential programs for individuals with mental illness or mental retardation.
- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program (SANE) in hospital emergency rooms to provide both compassionate care for victims of sexual assault and forensic expertise. This program has increased convictions prosecution of rape cases.
- Massachusetts is the first state to require disclosure of cigarette additives and a more accurate method for reporting nicotine yield.
- 1998** First state in the nation to place nursing home performance ratings on the internet to help consumers select nursing homes.
- 1999** First state to use consumer protection laws to limit cigarette tobacco advertising near schools.

21st Century

- 2004** Betsy Lehman Center for Patient Safety and Medical Error Reduction established.
Smoke-Free Workplace Law becomes effective.
- 2006** Chapter 58 of the Acts of 2006 An Act Providing Access To Affordable, Quality, Accountable Health Care passes.

