Fact sheet

For 90 years, the Mailman School of Public Health has been a global leader in the development of science, policy, and programs to improve health and prevent disease and disability.

With faculty and students at work in more than 100 countries around the world and actively contributing to improved health in Northern Manhattan, the Mailman School is a leading force in global and urban health. Our faculty includes world authorities on climate and health, HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, healthy aging, maternal health, environmental toxins, infectious disease, the history and ethics of public health, healthcare reform, and strategies to strengthen healthcare systems.

Raising understanding of public health’s return on investment, Mailman researchers seek answers to the biggest health challenges we face. These include the aging of global populations; the spread of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity; emerging infectious diseases; and the need for new statistical models and tools that harness increasingly large sets of data.

The Mailman School is an innovator in public health education, with a new Master of Public Health curriculum that sets a rigorous new standard, equipping future leaders in the field with knowledge that transcends conventional public health practice.

MISSION

- Address the most important issues that challenge the health of populations
- Identify effective approaches to prevent disease and disability
- Create health equity in a diverse world
- Educate the next generation of public health leaders

We aim to achieve our mission locally and globally through innovative science, education, and leadership.

We are guided by the fundamental principle that health is a human right.

MAILMAN SCHOOL FACTS

- Sixth biggest recipient of NIH research funds among schools of public health.
- Ranked in the top five schools of public health by U.S. News & World Report.
- One of the three oldest public health academies in the U.S.
- Six months after graduating, 96 percent of the school’s 2013 class was employed in public health.
- ICAP has provided HIV services to more than 1.8 million people around the world. Led by pioneering physician Dr. Wafaa El-Sadr, ICAP has supported work at more than 3,995 health facilities in 21 countries.
- The Center for Infection & Immunity pioneered tools to rapidly identify viruses. A World Health Organization collaborating center, CII is led by world-class microbe hunter Dr. W. Ian Lipkin, who has identified more than 500 new viruses.
- Interdisciplinary research programs draw faculty from across the school to consider complex systems approaches to address obesity, incarceration and urban health.
- The Center for the History and Ethics of Public Health is one of six institutions designated as WHO collaborating centers on ethics and is the only one focused on public health.
Key areas of investigation

- The Columbia Center for Children’s Environmental Health conducts studies that uncover health risks from common pollutants with the goal of protecting children’s health. Among the findings: prenatal exposure to air pollution can increase the likelihood of cognitive deficits, asthma, and obesity.

- Mailman researchers are examining the social, genetic, and environmental factors behind mental illness. A study of post-traumatic stress disorder, for example, suggests that traumatic experiences “biologically embed” themselves in genes—pointing to a new model of PTSD in which alteration of genes, induced by a traumatic event, changes a person’s stress response and leads to the disorder.

- By applying recent findings from South Asia to the U.S., researchers discovered that the drinking water in three Maine school districts was responsible for dangerous levels of exposure to arsenic, which correlated with a disturbing decline in child intelligence. Public health outreach is underway to educate local families about the risks.

- Working closely with ministries of health, ICAP and other programs are developing innovative ways to strengthen health systems, including improved nurse education in sub-Saharan Africa.

- As obesity rates soar, Mailman school experts on the “built environment” are examining the impact of access to parks, public transit, retail stores, and pedestrian-friendly street design. Among their findings: Neighborhoods with a mix of residential and commercial uses have lower levels of obesity than areas that are largely residential. Other researchers are studying the impact of policies like a “soda tax” would have on obesity.

- The Columbia Climate and Health Program explores the impact of climate change on health in order to advance society’s capacity to prevent adverse consequences. Its scientists calculated that six climate change-related events in the past decade triggered $14 billion in healthcare costs.

- Why are cancer survival rates so much lower among racial and ethnic minorities? Our research has shown that such disparities are greatest for treatable cancers that can be detected early—a finding that underscores the importance of making cancer screening such as mammography more available to minorities.

- The Department of Biostatistics designs and analyzes large-scale clinical research studies. Co-led by Columbia cardiologists, the WARCEF trial compared aspirin and warfarin (Coumadin) treatments for heart failure, following 2,305 patients in 11 countries. The result: both therapies are equally effective, but many may choose aspirin because of its low cost and convenience.