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National Board of Health




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## Viewpoint: Public health

Presentation by Lis Keiding, National Board of Health, Denmark,  
Child health and the environment, Bruxelles,  
24 November 2005

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## The world of health determinants



Hovedfaktorer for sundhedsvælgelighed

Frit efter Anne Skotte & Finn Knoppe-Jørgensen og bogen "Forebyggende Sundhedsarbejde" Miksaard, 1986. John Alftage

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## Public health I

- Health of **groups** of people
- Monitoring of health of the population, indicators
- Identification and quantification of risks and health promoting factors
- Preventable hazardous factors
- Health promotion and prevention, put in order of priority
- Health care system:  
Need of qualifications and capacity of diagnosing, identification of etiology, treatment, rehabilitation

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## Public health II

Monitoring:

- Registers
- Health surveys, health profiles
- Indicators (risk factors, health effects, policies etc.)
- Biomonitoring

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## Public health III

Prevention of risks:

Planning: involvement of stakeholders, target groups

- Recommendations on interventions, implementation and evaluation
- Action plans (prevention of diseases, env. health etc.)
- Advice to regulating authorities
- Advice to risk groups in the population  
Children: also advice to people taking care of children

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## A typical day for a public health specialist working with environmental health at a health authority

- Comments to the new EU directive on air quality
- Paragraph on children in the National Health Action Plan
- A journalist asks: Mobile phones – special risk to children?
- Budget for environmental health activities for 2006 (part of activities on health promotion and prevention generally)
- A group of citizens ask: relation btw. polluted drinking water and diseases in a local community?
- Interventions on young people's exposure to loud music?
- An NGO asks: What does it mean when you find several chemicals in the blood, also in young people?

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### Assessments of environmental risks

- Potential risks identified by health impact assessment (HIA) at the planning stage
- Risk assessment of existing scenario of exposure
- Assessment of environmental causes of accumulation of malformations, diseases and disabilities

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### Communication on environmental risks

To

- Professional people (medical, technical etc.)
- Non professional people

Often uncertainties of cause effect relationships

Risk of adverse effects of communication of risks:

Threatening, decreased life quality, limiting breast feeding etc.

Importance of balanced communication  
(broad public health view, give possibilities of action)

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### Environmental factors influenced by authorities' policies

- Chemicals in products and in food
- Pollution in outdoor air, water, soil
- Passive smoking at public places
- Planning of built environment
- Access to green areas
- Etc.

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### Environmental factors influenced by habits (kind of lifestyle)

Examples

- Ventilation of the home
- Preparing of food
- Hand hygiene
- Use of wood burning stoves
- Transport habits

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### Borderline between public health interventions and political decisions

- When is the suspicion of hazardous effects sufficient for interventions to be needed?
- Use of precautionary principle
- Principles for setting limit values
- Which precautionary actions may be done easily and without high costs?
- Which public health actions are most important, given a limited budget?
- Which kind of risks are reasonable to compare?

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### Policy interpretation of existing knowledge on children's environment and health

- Expected to be a useful tool in public health
- Helps to be up to date in this broad area  
- will it be followed up internationally?
- Probably will give rise to discussions among authorities, in the media, among politicians etc.