

Public health has taken a huge credibility hit during the COVID pandemic. Here's what led to this crisis

[P]ublic health has [succeeded marvelously by some measures](#), lengthening life spans and bringing many diseases to heel. But when the coronavirus pandemic reached the United States, it found [a public-health system in disrepair](#). That system, with its overstretched staff, meager budgets, crumbling buildings, and archaic equipment, could barely cope with sickness as usual, let alone with a new, fast-spreading virus.

[By one telling](#), public health was a victim of its own success, its value shrouded by the complacency of good health. [By a different account](#), the competing field of medicine actively suppressed public health, which threatened the financial model of treating illness in (insured) individuals.

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This revolution in thinking gave public health license to be less revolutionary. Many practitioners no longer felt compelled to deal with sticky, sweeping problems such as poverty, inequity, and racial segregation (or to consider their own role in maintaining the status quo).

"They didn't have to think of themselves as activists," [public-health historian David] Rosner said. "It was so much easier to identify individual victims of disease and cure them than it was to rebuild a city."

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.**](#)