Public Health Nurse
- more than a jab of the needle

An information leaflet on the public health nurse services
What does the public health nurse do?

The public health nurse services are part of the municipalities’ statutory public health service that covers the needs for nursing services related to health promoting and preventive work. Information, supervision and counselling work within the national field of activity are especially emphasised.

The work tasks are first and foremost related to the public health centres for children of 0 to 5 years, the school health services in elementary, secondary and upper secondary schools, and the public health centres for adolescents and young people. The work is extensive, from detailed examinations to supervision and support to parents with infants and small children, as well as older children, adolescents and young people.

The public health nurse provides services to all children, adolescents and young people with a systematic health service “from crib to grave”, and is thus a central agent in the public health work of the municipalities.
The public health nurse’s field of practice is:

Public Health Centre 0 – 5 years
- Home visits
- Examinations of infants and small children
- Parental counselling, supervision and information on health issues – individually and in groups
- Vaccinations
- Social networking
- Inter-professional collaboration, individual plans and responsibility groups

Public Health Centre for Adolescents and Young People
Counselling, advising and provision of health information related to:
- Young people, relationships and sexuality
- Mental health
- Physical health
- Lifestyle and health
- Adolescents, teenagers and young people with special problems
- Inter-professional collaboration

School health services:
- Health information, education, supervision and counselling – individually and in groups
- Vaccinations
- Collaboration with parents, school and others
- Environmental activities – focus on the working environment of the students
- “Open door” policy – easily accessible for the students
- Inter-professional collaboration, individual plans and responsibility groups
Environmental health promotion/infectious disease control

- Travel medicine – counselling and vaccinations
- Tuberculosis work
- Other types of work concerning infectious disease control: prevention of diseases like HIV, Hepatitis etc.
- Health information

Refugee health services

- Examinations of newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers
- Health information and supervision
- Psychosocial work
- Follow-up work
- Vaccinations
What competence has a public health nurse?

The public health nurse has:

- In the course of the specialist studies developed an understanding for how the various factors of societal, environmental and personal character create conditions for health.
- A combination of nursing studies and specialist studies that gives the public health nurse a special competence in information, counselling and supervision to parents, children, adolescents, young people, groups and local communities.
- The ability to discover, support and supervise children, adolescents and young people in need of special follow-up because of illness, decreased functional competence, abuse and/or neglect or risk for this.
- A high level of competence for collaboration, having many collaborators in the municipality, both at individual and systemic levels. The closest collaborators are physicians, midwives, physiotherapists, personnel in child welfare, pedagogical psychological service, nursery school and school.
- Special competence in infectious disease control and vaccination work
- Independent right to requisition hormonal prevention and vaccines in the Norwegian child vaccination programme.
How is the work of public health nurses regulated?

The public health centres and school health services, the main settings of public health nurses, are statutory public services in Norway, pursuant to the provisions in the Municipal Health Services Act.

“The intention is, by the use of public health centres and school health services, to promote mental and physical health, promote good social and environmental conditions, prevent illness and injury.”
Regulation of 3 April 2003, Objects clause § 1.1.

Regulation of 3 April 2003:
"On the municipal health promoting and preventive work at the health centres and in the school health service” indicates more detailed provisions for the public health services.
The public health centres and the school health service are voluntary and free of charge public health services for families, children, adolescents and young people 0–20 years of age.

The regulations on statutory nursing services in the municipal health services require that the municipalities have a public health nurse service, and that this service shall be led by a public health nurse.
How to become a public health nurse

A public health nurse is an authorised nurse who has completed accredited public health nursing studies. The public health nursing studies are based on the ideological foundation of nursing, and provide in-depth studies in health promoting and preventive work focused on children, young people and their families.

Before entering specialist studies in public health nursing, a minimum of one year of nursing practice in required. The specialist studies give 60 study points, and completion requires 1 year full-time or 2 years part-time studies.

As of this date there are 8 university colleges/universities that provide specialist studies in public health nursing.
Public health nursing – historic backdrop

Prevention of illness is not new – throughout history man has been concerned about how to promote health and prevent illness. Florence Nightingale realised the importance of preventive work. She established a system of health visitors who were to seek visit women and children in their homes. The health of mother and child was to be the focal point. This way Florence Nightingale provided the basis for the establishment of public health nursing.

The first Norwegian public measures in order to better children’s health came when the Kristiania Health Commission discussed the high rate of infant mortality in the 1890ies. The first public health centre for mother and child in Norway was opened in 1911. The Norwegian Women’s Public Health Association opened its first centre of control for mother and child in Oslo in 1914. The nurse employed by the control centre assisted the physician and visited the homes during the children’s first year. The school health service was systemised in Oslo from 1918.

The title public health nurse was used for the first time in 1925. A special act on the public health nurse services was adopted in 1957. This act was repealed when the Municipal Health Services Act came into force in 1984. By then the public health nurse service was established in several countries, and now interest for this work started to gain momentum in Norway. The first courses for public health nurses started in the 1920ies and 30ies, and were run by various voluntary organisations.

In 1946 the Norwegian Parliament approved the establishment of a school for public health nurses in Norway. The first students at the State Public Health Nursing School started their studies in 1947. A national plan for public health nursing was approved by the Norwegian Ministry of Church, Education and Research in 1998.
“Without doubt the public health nurse service represents the most important general preventive measure in the post-war period to this date.”

Stadsfysikus (Head of the Oslo Health Agency) Fredrik Mellbye 1989

The public health nurse is - and will continue to be – an all-important agent in the local public health work in the municipalities.

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