

Summary: A Brief History of Public Health in Alexandria and Alexandria's Health Department

In Alexandria, and elsewhere in the country, eighteenth and early nineteenth-century responses to community health usually appeared in two forms: 1) the passage of nuisance ordinances and 2) quarantines related to specific epidemics. In 1872, Alexandria became one of eight states to establish a Board of Health and Vital Statistics, the primary function of which was to deal with epidemics affecting the Commonwealth. By the end of World War I, Alexandria established a full-time Health Department to protect the public from communicable diseases and implement health and hygiene measures. As new discoveries and ideas impacting medicine were made, Alexandria's Health Department embraced them. By 1923, many communicable diseases were rapidly declining, and by the 1930s, many diseases were contained through a combination of immunizations and sanitation. Over time, the Health Department's priorities expanded and shifted, moving away from epidemics and sanitation to preventive care and environmental health. Two of the biggest issues in the late twentieth century included teen pregnancy and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. By the twenty-first century, the threat of bioterrorism brought new and old problems together once again. The Health Department was located at 517 North St. Asaph Street from 1944 through 2004; it later moved to 4480 King Street