

Epidemiologist

Work out why people are getting sick, and what would stop it. Mostly data, occasionally an outbreak.

TYPICAL PAY

\$87,220

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$61k to \$139k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

6 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Health departments, hospitals,
universities, drug companies**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Biology, statistics and as much math as your school offers. A computer class is worth more here than in most health careers.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Biology, statistics, public health, mathematics or nursing all work. Get research experience with a professor, even unpaid, because it is what admissions committees look for.
- 3 Master of public health in epidemiology** 2 years
Two years covering study design, biostatistics and data analysis, plus a supervised practice placement. Choose a school accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health.
- 4 First job** Hired on
Health department, hospital or research group. You will spend it cleaning and analyzing data, which is the real craft.
- 5 Optional doctorate or fellowship** 2 to 5 years
A doctorate for research leadership, or a federal field fellowship for hands-on outbreak work.

Pros and cons

- + A rapidly growing field with a strong federal outlook
- + Six years of school, not eleven, and no licensing exam
- + Public health employers qualify for federal loan forgiveness
- Government pay scales are rigid and rise slowly
- Most days are data cleaning, not disease detection
- Public health funding rises and falls with politics and emergencies

Optional boosts

Infectious disease. Chronic disease. Drug safety. Environmental and occupational.

Good to know

The disease detectives have been running since 1951

The Epidemic Intelligence Service, the two-year field training program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has trained more than 4,100 officers since it started. Its graduates worked on smallpox...

Most of the job is spreadsheets

Outbreak response is the visible part, and it is a small part. The everyday work is surveillance data, cleaning records, checking definitions and writing reports. People who love the detective story a...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Epidemiologists (19-1041.00)
Council on Education for Public Health
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Epidemic Intelligence Service
University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health: epidemiology

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/epidemiologist>



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