

Public Health Law and Ethics

Facilitators

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Description

The challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic have illustrated the importance of law for dealing with such a major public health crisis (*e.g.*, non-pharmaceutical interventions, which are mainly based on law and regulation). The same applies to non-communicable diseases, where law and regulation are essential to address the ongoing challenges.

The course offers an introduction to law and ethics in public health practice through three related topics:

1) Public Health Law: normative analysis of how law shapes context (*e.g.*, social determinants of health such as the environment, education, housing, and work) and how law influences behavior (*e.g.*, legal tools such as command and control, information, and incentives).

2) Legal Epidemiology: scientific study and deployment of law as a factor in the cause, distribution, and prevention of disease in a population. The effective use of legal action for public health depends on the availability of rigorous and timely evaluation of the impact of law and legal practice on health. This evaluation is critical in a federal state such as Switzerland, where most public health regulations are adopted at a cantonal level (*e.g.*, impact assessment of mask mandates in schools on the appearance of clusters).

3) Public Health Ethics: introduction to ethics; public health ethics; ethics in human, animal, and health data research; the role of ethics committees.

Objectives

At the end of the course, students can:

- Identify the structure and functioning of the public health system in Switzerland and internationally.
- Indicate the relevant legal regulations concerning public health in Switzerland and internationally.
- Understand the role of the State in protecting and promoting public health.
- Assess the conflicts between individual freedom and public interest and discuss the limits of the State's power to impose public health rules on individuals.
- Explain the role of law as a determinant of health.
- Define the basics and principles of public health ethics.
- Understand the role of ethics in human, animal, and health data research and the role of ethics committees

Dates

27 – 29 January 2027

Eligibility

Open to SSPH+ IGC students, other students and external participants are welcome to apply for limited spaces.

Course Structure

The course takes place through in-class lectures (from multiple perspectives and backgrounds), guided analysis of case law, and critical discussion of practical cases.

Day 1: Public Health Law

Day 2: Legal Epidemiology

Day 3: Public Health Ethics

Assessment

Students will receive preparatory material in advance. The course will be assessed based on student presentations.

Credits

1 ECTS

Preliminary Work: 4 h; Contact time: 24 h; In-course work: 2 h

(1 ECTS corresponds to appr. 25-30 hours workload)

in collaboration with

Location University of Neuchâtel, Faculty of Law, Main Building, Avenue du 1er Mars 26, 2000 Neuchâtel

Course Fees

IGC course fees	1 ECTS
SSPH+ IGC PhD and MD Students	30 CHF
Postdocs from SSPH+ partner institutes with a SSPH+ Faculty Member as line manager	30 CHF
External PhD students, external MD Students, postdocs from SSPH+ partner institutes without a SSPH+ Faculty Member as line manager and Swiss Public Health Doctors in training	300 CHF
Others	800 CHF

Registration <https://www.conftool.com/ssph-phd-courses2027/>

Deadline for registration 27 December 2026