

Demand for public health graduates remains high through the COVID-19 pandemic

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COVID-19 has altered the labor market for millions of people, including public health graduates, yet an analysis of job postings for Master's level public health graduates showed that job postings remained at the same levels as before the pandemic, according to a new study at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. The findings are published in the *International Journal of Health Planning and Management*.

"Due to the crucial role of disease prevention in responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 [pandemic](#), assessing the public health workforce remains critically important," said Heather Krasna, MS, EdM, assistant dean of career services at Columbia Mailman School, and lead author of the study. "Fortunately, the [job market](#) for master's level public health graduates has not been as negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as compared with the broader job market." Alternatively, overall job postings nationally dropped by up to 30 percent in the U. S. due to the pandemic.

An analysis of more than 38,533 job postings for

master's level public health grads found that there were 92 different occupations which sought to hire public health graduates or that existed within the public health workforce.

To pinpoint changing employer demands associated with COVID-19, the researchers analyzed 24,516 postings from March 2019 to October 2019—pre-COVID—and compared them with 24,845 postings from March 2020 to October 2020 in the COVID era. The study utilized a job postings database, maintained by Burning Glass (BG) Technologies.

"Through an analysis of job postings in two timeframes, before COVID-19 and during the COVID-19 pandemic, we can assess whether demand for public health graduates has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Krasna. "While there is no doubt that the [labor market](#) for millions of people changed with COVID-19, including public health graduates, it is notable that there were several hundred more job postings for public health graduates in the COVID-era, compared to pre-COVID [jobs](#)."

Pharmaceutical companies and insurance firms increased their numbers of job postings for public health graduates, while nonprofits and academia have seen job postings drop during COVID-19. Since the pandemic, up to 28 percent of job postings for public health graduates were in fields outside of the job definitions which have traditionally been listed as part of the public health workforce.

According to Krasna and colleagues, with this latest analysis, workforce planners and [academic institutions](#) can help identify possible workforce gaps, ensure that curriculum addresses the current needs of organizations hiring public health graduates, and provide insights to academia for curricula innovation.

The data also show a shortfall of positions for approximately 19 percent of Master's level public health graduates entering into government after graduation. This mismatch—in which not enough public health graduates are entering government to fill critical public health workforce shortages—may have serious repercussions for the ability of the governmental public health agencies to respond to public health crises including COVID-19.

The jobs with the fastest increases in hiring during the COVID-19 era focus on statistics and epidemiology, program management, computer-related positions, community health workers, and individuals managing clinical trials or research programs. An increased need for Chief Executives highlights the need for [leadership training](#) to meet the COVID-19 pandemic's management challenges or replace retiring public health executives. Universities preparing public [health](#) graduates can utilize this analysis to discern real-time job market requirements of employers, noted Krasna.

More information: Heather Krasna et al, Labour market competition for public health graduates in the United States: A comparison of workforce taxonomies with job postings before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management* (2021). DOI: [10.1002/hpm.3128](https://doi.org/10.1002/hpm.3128)

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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