

***By Dr. Joann Schaefer***

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We're at a critical juncture in time. Our kids could be the healthiest nation in one generation, but only if we take action now.

Public health has made major strides in our country in the last century—immunizations, safe drinking water, seatbelts, smoking prevention and cessation, and health promotion.

In 1900, people lived on average until age 48. Today it's 78. Thanks to public health we've gained 30 years of life that our great grandparents didn't have.

You might think that we're one of the healthiest nations in the world but we're not. Life expectancy in the United States ranks 46th in the world, behind Japan, South Korea and most of Europe.

Unfortunately, the growing rate of obesity among children may mean that kids will live shorter lives than their parents.

Obesity is associated with Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer. All three of these are in Nebraska's top 10 causes of death.

So what will it take to meet the goal of the American Public Health Association—"the healthiest nation in one generation?"

It will take healthy mother/healthy baby check-ups, breastfeeding, clean air, school nutrition programs, safe workplaces, services for the elderly, STD awareness and prevention, and more public health efforts.

Public health ensures safe communities that provide conditions in which health can flourish.

Healthy communities may supply jogging trails and bike paths, make farmers markets and grocery stores with healthful foods readily available in all neighborhoods, ban smoking in indoor workplaces, and provide safe playgrounds for children.

A healthier America won't be possible without the support of our communities. And by adopting a healthier lifestyle, we encourage others to do the same.

We can teach a new generation that simple actions—like eating healthy, exercising and not smoking—will lead to happier and longer lives. Healthy children become healthy adults.

To learn more about public health, check out <http://www.generationpublichealth.org/>.