



ROLE OF THE HEALTH OFFICER

PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

The local Health Officer is a municipal employee, appointed by the NH Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS), who is an important and trusted point of contact for local concerns and fulfills a critical role in enforcing public health laws and proposing local health-related ordinances. As secretary and executive officer of the local board of health for the town, the health officer responds to concerns and issues and completes inspections at the request of state agencies such as NH DHHS, NH Department of Environmental Services and the NH Department of Education. Through inspections, guidance, enforcement, and rule-making, the health officer helps to improve and foster safe and healthy environments for people to live in.

Applicable Laws

State laws called Revised Statutes Annotated (RSAs) specify your authority:

[RSA 128: Town Health Officers](#)

RSA 128 outlines the duties and responsibilities of local health officers.

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The job of the local Health Officer is to educate, gather evidence, and enforce laws as needed. Specific tasks include:

- Shall** investigate, enforce, and resolve local public health issues
- Shall** know the relevant State and local laws providing authority to the local health officer
- Shall** respond to requests for inspection assistance from State agencies
- Shall** report concerns of elder or child abuse, neglect, or self-neglect
- May** provide guidance and education to the community on public health issues
- May** refer residents or complainants to appropriate State agencies

For more information

Visit dhhs.nh.gov/HealthOfficer or call 603-271-3468



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HEALTH OFFICER REQUIREMENTS

Health officers are nominated by their Boards of Selectman and then appointed by the NH DHHS. There are no training or qualification requirements beyond providing a criminal records history request that is reviewed by the town. Within the first year of appointment, the health officer must take a NH DHHS 3-hour training course on the relevant State laws that provide authority to act, inspect, or receive information

(RSA 128.8). This training is provided free of charge by the NH DHHS and is offered through an online learning management system.

Additionally, health officers are required to meet with their local board of health at least once annually to review the state of local public health issues within their municipality. The board of health consists of, at a minimum, the health officer and the selectman.

Overview of Authority

Health officers have broad authority to investigate public health and sanitary concerns. While there are many locations in the RSAs that give you authority to act, health officers most commonly use authority outlined in the following statutes:

- **RSA 147 Public Health Nuisances:** Health officers of towns shall inquire into all nuisances and other causes of danger to the public health. These may include garbage, pests, unsanitary living conditions, septic failures, rodents, and more.
- **RSA 48-A: Minimum Housing Standards:** Health officers may respond to State minimum housing standard violations (RSA 48-A:14). However, consult with your town to understand if this is an authority designated to you within the municipal structure or provided to the local building or code enforcement officer.
- **RSA 155-B: Hazardous and Dilapidated Buildings:** The governing body of a town has the ability to determine if a building poses a hazard to the public health or general safety. The town may utilize the health officer to conduct inspections to gather evidence and make this determination.
- **Additional Local Ordinances:** Towns may draft local regulations that give you additional authority. Be familiar with any applicable local ordinances.

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Enforcement Tools

Under RSA 128, health officers are required to enforce public health laws and rules. RSA 147 outlines some enforcement tools you may use to assist in enforcement proceedings:

Rulemaking (RSA 147.1): Health officers may make regulations for the prevention and removal of nuisances and other such regulations relating to the public health. The NH DHHS Health Officer Liaison Unit has sample ordinances you may reference.

Removal Notices (RSA 147.4): The health officer may notify a property owner in writing to remove or destroy the source of a public health nuisance. Health officers have the authority to issue order letters to have public health nuisances removed.

Administrative Warrants (RSA 147.3): Health officers may obtain an administrative inspection warrant to conduct inspections.

Common Partners

Health officers work with various state agencies and programs to respond to public health issues that may arise in their municipalities.

Common partners include:

- NH DPHS Healthy Homes & Environment Section
- NH DPHS Bureau of Infectious Disease
- NH DHHS Foster Care Program
- NH DHHS Childcare Licensing
- NH Department of Environmental Services
- New Hampshire Health Officer Association
- New Hampshire Municipal Association.
- New Hampshire Department of Education

Support for Health Officers

The NH DHHS, Division of Public Health Services, Health Officer Liaison Unit (HOLU) completes appointments and provides technical assistance and training opportunities for local health officers. Below are resources you may utilize through this program:

- **Private Listserv:** As part of your appointment, you will be granted access to a private listserv of all local health officers. While the HOLU program will distribute information and updates, you are also welcome to pose questions and respond to the questions of others.
- **Health Officer Manual:** An online manual containing guidance documents is located on the HOLU website and is where health officers can learn how to appropriately respond to various issues you may encounter in your role.
- **Virtual training opportunities:** Periodic webinars with subject matter experts are available to health officers. Additionally, health officers have access to an online learning manage-

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The New Hampshire Health Officer Association

The NH Health Officer Association (NHHOA) is a private organization, with more than 100 members, whose mission for over 70 years is to promote high standards of professionalism among municipal and regional health officers through programs of education, technical assistance, legislative representation, and collaboration with public health colleagues. Guided by a Board of Directors and subcommittees that are involved in policy development, data collection, communication, and professional development, this volunteer-run organization is where health officers collaborate with one another. .

The NHHOA supports their vision of building, sustaining and empowering a local public health workforce, by sponsoring two in-person, full-day conferences each year for their membership. To learn more or to join the NHHOA, visit www.nhhealthofficers.org.

Additional Resources

- [NH DPHS Health Officer Liaison Unit](#)
- [NH DPHS Health Officer Manual](#)
- [New Hampshire Health Officer Asc.](#)
- [New Hampshire Municipal Asc.](#)

Health Officer Liaison Unit
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For more information

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