

Half Page Brief on Key Definitions

A disaster is an event that disrupts the ability of society to function as normal, whether by causing damage to infrastructure or resulting in injury or death to a population. A public health disaster is any disaster which impacts the ability of life-necessary institutions to function. Many types of disasters can disrupt life-necessary institutions, including natural disasters (such as tornadoes and tsunamis) but so can man-made disasters (such as nuclear explosions, or terrorist attacks). Acute disasters have minimal warning, whereas slow onset disasters may allow society to prepare for a disaster.

Public health impact can be measured through many indicators, such as loss of life, a break in life-necessary services such as a community's access to food and medicine, displacement of people, mental health impact, and more. An important metric to keep in mind is disproportionate impact on disadvantaged populations, which could allow for a more nuanced understanding of how certain population is experiencing a disaster, instead of an average of the experience that rich and poor neighborhoods experience. The impact on local health infrastructure is amongst the most important during a disaster because it can turn a disaster from bad to worse by limiting people's abilities to respond to their own injuries and increasing morbidity and mortality rates.

References

Gershon, Robyn. "Instructor's Notes 1A: Definition and Classification of Disasters and Preparedness." *NYU Brightspace*, Fall 2022: Management of Public Health Emergencies, <https://brightspace.nyu.edu/d2l/le/lessons/192779/topics/7065840>.