

Tufts MD/MPH Program FAQ's – for Class of 2025

1. Is the program accredited?

Yes, the Tufts MPH is fully accredited by the Council on Education in Public Health. The Tufts MPH is offered by the School of Medicine, and hence is a program within a school, and not an independent school of public health. This is why you might not see Tufts listed as an “accredited school of public health.” The MPH accreditation is essentially equivalent for schools and programs.

2. What do physicians do with a Tufts MPH degree?

The experience of Tufts MD/MPH graduates mirrors that of MD/MPH professionals nation-wide. The vast majority initially pursue clinical residencies and clinical careers. While many pursue training in primary care, a substantial minority go into other specialties, including the surgical sub-specialties. There is public health in every field of medicine! Beginning 7 – 10 years out, after establishing a clinical career, MD's with MPH training start to diverge. About 20% will pursue full-time careers in a formal public health setting, which could be in the federal system, a state health department, with one of the large city health departments, or as a county health officer. The remaining 80% of MD/MPH graduates are practicing clinicians, but it divides roughly evenly into two groups. Half have some definable portion of their job that specifically uses their MPH training. This could be in academics, in running a community health promotion/disease prevention program linked to their clinical site, in serving as a consultant (such as to a school health program), or in a variety of other settings. The others do not have an identifiable part of their job that is specific to public health, but almost all of these alum will tell you, “I am a different – and a better – doctor because of my MPH.”

3. How does the MPH program work?

Students take the core and required MPH classes on Tuesday afternoons during the first year and a half. Students are expected to do a 200 hour field experience between the 1st and 2nd years (during summer). During the 3rd and 4th years, students spend 3 months with the MPH program. In the late winter/ early spring of each year, students take elective courses (usually 2 in 3rd year, 3 in 4th year). Students also take 1 required course, a course on health care services, during one of these two elective blocks. In addition, students spend a month (a single clinical elective block) doing their “ALE”, an independent public health project that serves as a formal “culminating experience” and demonstrates to the faculty that the student is capable of independent professional work in public health. Students also attend a once per month evening seminar over the first three years of the program, as part of a course designed to help students integrate their public health work with their clinical studies. Students usually lose 2 clinical electives in order to take the 3 months in the MPH during the clinical years.

4. How is it possible to do both programs in 4 years?

It is challenging but it is possible. Of the 20 or so students who start, one or two may choose to leave because of the workload, but the vast majority figure out how to do it and decide the program is worth the extra work. In addition, student performances in medical school, the boards, and residency matches are at least as good for MD/MPH students as for MD students.

5. No really, how?

We think two factors make it possible for students to take an MPH even though the notion of doing a degree in addition to the medical degree seems so daunting. First – the material and the learning activities of public health are so different from medicine that students find studying for public health a method of taking time off from studying medicine – and everyone needs time off! Many students even say that the MPH work energizes them and this in turn makes medical school easier. Although studying public health might not be as much fun as a movie, it is different enough from studying medicine that it works.

Second, the MPH and the cohort model give students a community of support. When studying crunch times occur (and they do), students in the combined degree often support each other and study together and in this way help get each other through what certainly can be at certain times each semester a heavy and stressful workload.

A final way to measure the effect of the work load – we see no difference between MD and MD/MPH students in pass rates, grades, and board scores. We think the MPH is a major boost in terms of residency matching. Although students do work a bit harder, for the vast majority of students it does not appear to put their MD performance in jeopardy.

6. Can you go abroad?

Yes. Students can travel abroad for the summer field experience, for the ALE, or both. These are popular options and in most recent years as many as half of students have done public health work abroad as part of their degree. Some students go twice, and some combine an opportunity to go abroad with the 5 year option (see question 9, below). Tufts has formal programs in several countries, and students are also given support for developing their own contacts and opportunities abroad. In recent years, the school has been able to provide stipends, awarded on a competitive basis, for many of these experiences. Funding is year to year, but we expect to have at least some stipend support for many of these projects in future years.

7. Can you specialize?

No, not in public health – the combined program is a generalist program. The generalist label refers to the public health training and NOT at all to medical training or

opportunities. This is both a matter of educational philosophy and logistical necessity. Regarding logistics, the only way to provide an MPH degree to students in the clinical doctoral programs in a 4 year period is by having a cohort travel together and take classes at specially designated times agreed to by the participating schools. Under these conditions, it is not possible to have a variety of specializations available to students.

This is also an educational decision. Two important realities about the career tracks of medical students are important to note. First, most students first develop their clinical career and take up public health as a professional endeavor 5 or more years distant. From this perspective, the program needs to stress a conceptual education in order to establish a basis for continuing self-education in public health. It is unlikely that students can now know what specific skills they will need, or that they will retain those skills even if they do. The broad-based curriculum prepares the student to understand the field of public health so as to be prepared to participate in a broad range of potential professional settings.

Second, physicians in public health tend to enter the profession in formal or informal leadership roles, and here again having a broad, conceptual understanding of the field is more critical than skill in a specific methodology.

Finally, the curriculum offers many opportunities for student to pursue their own interests. The summer field experience and the Applied Learning Experience offer two opportunities to pursue personal interests.

You can do the MPH and go into any clinical specialty. We're very careful to point out that there are public health opportunities in every specialty of medicine, and although about 2/3 go into primary care disciplines, we have significant numbers who go into other specialties and we see that the MPH is helpful vis-à-vis residency applications across the board.

8. What courses are required?

- Population Health and the Profession of Medicine (Yr. 1)
- Social & Behavioral Foundation of Public Health (Yr. 1)
- Epidemiology & Biostatistics Parts 1 and 2 (Yr. 1)
- Principles of Management (Yr. 1)
- Integration of Public Health Seminar (Yrs. 1 – 3)
- Summer Field Experience (Summer between Yr. 1 & Yr. 2)
- Quality Improvement (Yr. 2 or 3)
- Research Methods (Yr. 2)
- Occupational and Environmental Health (Yr. 2)
- Public Health Law (Yr. 2)
- Health Care Services (Yr. 3)
- Applied Learning Experience (Yr. 4)

9. Before accepting this offer, what would happen if for financial reasons someone decides they no longer want to be part of the dual degree program when arriving in August? Can you follow the regular MD track?

When a student is accepted into the MD/MPH, they are given a choice at that time to decide whether to accept the MD/MPH or the traditional MD spot. When you accept the offer to the MD/MPH program, you must surrender your current spot in the traditional MD program, which we would then offer to another applicant. You would not have the option of changing your mind. You should accept our MD/MPH offer only if you are committed to enrolling in the program. Note that students who start the program and find themselves in the small subset who are a risk for academic difficulty may request a change to the traditional degree program if and when that circumstance arises.

9. Can Maine Track students do the MD/MPH?

Yes. Second year courses are offered through distance technology and/or on site at Maine to allow Maine Track students to do the MPH degree.

10. Is there a 5 year option?

Yes, but it is very different from the 5 year model offered by most other schools. Sometimes as many as $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of MD/MPH students take this option, for which there is no added tuition cost. The most common (and recommended) way to do this is to take a research leave after the end of the 3rd year. This leave freezes student loans. Students may not matriculate at Tufts for course credit while on leave, but the research leave allows students the opportunity to do the field work leading to their ALE and/or to take courses at other institutions. Students can do a much more substantive project (often leading to published papers), and can get course credit for the ALE when they return as 4th year students and complete their analysis and write up of the project. In addition, for no added cost, the medical school allows students to return “early” to the 4th year, so students can convert what is usually a 11 month year into a 12 - 14 month year, and in this way can “get back” the clinical electives that they would have given up in order to participate in the 3 months of MPH activity during 3rd and 4th year.

11. What are the added costs of the MPH portion of the program?

The program currently costs \$7216.00 per year, or \$28,864 for the degree. Tuition generally rises each year at roughly 3%. The cost of the Tufts MPH as a stand-alone degree is roughly \$66,000, and so the MPH is discounted at approximately 60%. Students planning to do the program should contact our Financial Aid office for general information about the aid available for MD/MPH students

12. If I indicate my MD/MPH interest on my secondary application, is there an additional essay I have to write?

There is an MD/MPH program app with essays on our secondary app web site that you must submit in addition to your secondary app if you want to be considered for our MD/MPH program.

13. Also, if I check the "Combined Medical Degree/Graduate" box on AMCAS, am I merely indicating interest or am I fully committing to apply to the program?

Tufts handles combined degree program applications at the secondary app level, not the AMCAS app level. You don't need to check MD/Grad as your program choice for Tufts, and we will ignore it if you do.

14. If I get accepted into both the school of medicine and the MD/MPH program, will I be able to accept the M.D. program and decline the MD/MPH option?

If you are admitted to the MD/MPH program, you would then have your choice of programs and two weeks to decide.

15. I have other questions – what do I do?

Some additional details are available on the website: go to:

<https://publichealth.tufts.edu/graduate-programs/dual-degrees/md-mph>

Email the Public Health Program Director, Anthony Schlaff, at Anthony.schlaff@tufts.edu. He will be happy to set up a time to talk with you either in person or on the phone. You are also encouraged to talk with students currently in the program. If you don't run into any during the interview day, you can contact the PHPD Admissions Office at ph.admissions@tufts.edu, and that office can put you in touch with students.