### Topic

**The 2020-2021 CEDA topic area should be Public Health**. Specifically, the topic should be able whether the United States federal government should substantially increase its public health regulations in the United States. The case is straight forward:

1. **Health is the topic of the day**. With the unprecedented spread of COVID-19 affecting the debate community, the country, and the world, it is an extremely timely and salient issue to discuss. This will likely remain true throughout the season, as reports from the CDC and UK NHS project waves of the disease through the next 12-18 months[[1]](#footnote-1). Even were it to be controlled sooner, it will leave a lasting impact and exigency to prepare for the next pandemic. Public health is an issue that is on the mind of almost every person and we should harness that interest. The debate community should choose a topic that has immediate resonance in order to attract broader awareness and influence within public and academic circles and potentially recruit increased participation.

2. **It’s not just any topic**. The coronavirus is a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic that is having profound effects on all aspects of society. It is said by some to be our generation’s greatest challenge[[2]](#footnote-2). It may infect up to half of the global population[[3]](#footnote-3) and kill millions. Social distancing has altered American life in significant and potentially irreversible ways. The effects will last far longer than the disease[[4]](#footnote-4). Imagine you are debating in 1942, during World War II. What should the topic be? The ongoing global war or something random like whether cars should have seatbelts? This is the year to debate this topic. AI or antitrust or whatever can come later.

3. The **economic fallout** from COVID-19 is already significant and will be increasingly severe, impacting university budgets and the economic viability of debate programs[[5]](#footnote-5). The full impact of the early end of in-person teaching and Fall 2020 enrollment, and the attendant trickle-down impact on academic programming is yet to be felt. We should be ahead of the curve in as many ways as possible. One means of doing so, which certainly needs to be packaged with a broader effort to make the case for debate, is making the case that debate contributes to matters of timely and immediately practical significance for the campus community. There is no topic better suited for doing so than debating public health. Administrators will not need to be told why we are debating disease preparedness. If we choose otherwise, they will need to be told why we are not.

4. From a competitive standpoint, **timely topics are the best topics**. A common concern is that topics will change mid-year, altering the arguments available to both teams. Sometimes suddenly. Timely topics can be fluid and unpredictable. They may require teams to rework their positions on short notice. … Good! In my experience, those are absolutely the most interesting, challenging, creative, and memorable debates that can occur. On the 2010-2011 high school Military Presence topic, it was announced that Osama Bin Laden had been killed by U.S. Special Forces on the night before the elims of the TOC. Teams that followed the news and improved their arguments prospered. On the 2009-2010 Nuclear Weapons topic, the key article for the Sole Purpose CP was written during the middle of the Coast. A major elim was won within a day on the argument by a prepared team. These debates stand out because they showcased the ingenuity of teams ready to prepare and execute evolving hours and impressive levels of research prowess demonstrated by those who took articles and turned them into arguments within hours. In my view, there would be nothing more awesome than a topic with evolving high-quality literature creating a constant supply of new arguments on both sides for those willing to dig in.

5. If you’re sold on **Public Health**, but not sure about the **Mechanism**, this is for you:

a) Vote for Public Health as the area and figure the mechanism out later. Normally, we as a community expect topic papers that are prepared and deep with cards and a vision for what the exact resolution would look like. The Space topic paper laid out something very close to the final resolution (with the addition of just specific countries and areas between). This should be an exception from that rule. The area is changing rapidly and we have plenty of time to figure out later what the best approach to require from the affirmative will be. Just pick the area now.

b) I suggest that the topic should be USFG regulation of public health in the United States. I do not think we should be bound to that idea if Public Health is chosen, but it does seem like a good place to start. The best topics are defined by having a unified mechanism that generally forces the affirmative to defend a sub-optimal idea.

6. RE: what is the **Neg ground**?

a) The axis of ground in this area is not the harm (health) but the mechanism (federal regulation). The desired balance between the aff/neg could be adjusted during the topic process to require progressively less defensible forms of regulation (comprehensive, uniform, travel bans, quarantine, etc.) in order to amplify negative ground.

b) If left as ‘regulation of public health’, the following is core Neg ground:

--incentives CPs

--business confidence DAs

-- elections (it will actually probably be the issue that decides the election)

--States CPs

--federalism (states and localities are the primary regulators of health)

--administrative DAs (CDC overstretch or other DAs about regulatory enforcement)

--PICs/arguments about regional variation (‘public health’ is commonly defined as the health of the population as a whole)

--international coordination/multilateral CPs

--advantage CPs about alternative points of intervention w/ specific solvency turns – there is a deep debate what targeting proximate vs. deeper social determinates of health

--Ks of health (see below)

c) The Neg will find a way. The Space topic proves. Very little of the ground identified in the topic paper ended up being relevant in any meaningful way during the season. There was almost no literature base about space cooperation in the abstract that supported the Neg. Yet, debates were won. We exist in a community of innovators who will find the slim angles and make it happen and, with a literature base as broad as public health in times of the coronavirus, that will certainly remain the case.

7. It’s a **very good K topic** on both sides. The intersection between race and public health is dynamic and able to sustain more than a season’s worth of debates, as demonstrated by Kansas KR’s (and many others) success on the 17-18 insurance topic. A Public Health topic in 20-21 could build on that and explore health through the lens of COVID-19 and/or intervention at the levels of cause, rather than only treatment[[6]](#footnote-6). There is also significant room for arguments about ableism, class and gender. More broadly, ‘public health’ has an enormous literature base, derived from thinkers like Foucault[[7]](#footnote-7) and from the field of Security Studies[[8]](#footnote-8). There is also plenty of scope for critical affs to explore what should constitute ‘public health’[[9]](#footnote-9), target regulations toward certain sections of the population, or argue that free market neoliberal approaches should be restrained.

1. <https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-pandemic-could-last-18-months.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/19/politics/millennials-coronavirus-social-responsibility/index.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/18/coronavirus-will-infect-half-the-global-population-eiu-predicts.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/19/coronavirus-effect-economy-life-society-analysis-covid-135579> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Great-Recession-Was-Bad/248317> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Examples of such arguments are here: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2020/03/19/481962/coronavirus-pandemic-racial-wealth-gap/>, here: <https://blackvoicenews.com/2020/03/23/warning-warning-covid-19-presents-enhanced-danger-for-nations-african-american-communities/>, and here: https://www.blackenterprise.com/civil-rights-leaders-call-out-congress-to-address-disproportionate-impact-of-covid-19-on-african-americans/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/?k=9781848550803> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://books.google.com/books?id=ZrxmCgAAQBAJ&newbks=1&newbks\_redir=0&lpg=PP1&dq=The%20Value%20of%20Resilience%3A%20Securing%20Life%20in%20the%20Twenty-first%20Century&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q=The%20Value%20of%20Resilience:%20Securing%20Life%20in%20the%20Twenty-first%20Century&f=false [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15722364> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)