

Government intervention in 19th-Century health

Use the sources to complete tasks 1-3.

For most of the 19th century the government took a laissez-faire approach. This meant they did not see it as the government's responsibility to get involved in public health. The combined pressure of Chadwick's report and the cholera epidemic put pressure on Parliament to take action.

The 1848 Public Health Act was the first act passed by government to improve public health. However, it was ineffective because councils could opt out. It wasn't until the 1875 Public Health Act that Councils were forced to act.

Source 1

The houses of 649 cases of infectious disease have been thoroughly stoved out and otherwise disinfected and 90 articles of bedding have been replaced...

Report of the Medical Officer of Health on the Sanitary Condition of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1874

Source 2

...several men and horses have been engaged every night in removing the contents of ash closets and boxes [outdoor, non-flushing toilets].

Report of the Medical Officer of Health on the Sanitary Condition of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1874

Source 3

Under the instruction of the Sanitary Authority the Borough Engineer has constructed 22 new sewers and repaired 25 new ones. 351 new ventilators, 283 gullies, 97 manholes, and 5 flushing gates have been inserted into sewers, and 165 sewers have been flushed - the whole at a cost of £5,046.

Report of the Medical Officer of Health on the Sanitary Condition of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1875

Tasks

- 1 Study Source 1. Describe two actions taken to improve housing conditions in Newcastle.
- 2 Study Source 2 and Source 3. What were the authorities in Newcastle spending money on and why do you think they were doing this?
- 3 Study all the sources. What evidence is there in these sources that the government was moving away from a laissez-faire approach to public health?