

Public Health

Laissez-faire

What's the idea?

- This French phrase loosely translated means 'leave be' and formed part of the belief that governments should not interfere in people's lives.
- The theory was a popular idea in the first half of the 19th century and prevented reforms happening sooner than they actually did.

Tell me more

- Problems experienced by people in the new industrial towns of the 19th century led many reformers like Edwin Chadwick to put pressure on the government to take responsibility for the welfare of the population.
- Chadwick's theory was opposed by some politicians who believed that the government should not interfere in public health.

What next?

- Laissez-faire lasted from about 1830 to 1880. It was one of the reasons why major reforms in public health were delayed until the 1870s.
- Various discoveries and a number of cholera epidemics all played their part in persuading the government to revert their decision from 'no' to 'yes'