

“More destructive...than the Enemy's Sword” Webquest

TASK 1:

George Washington faced a tough challenge in the midst of the Revolutionary War: an easily communicable disease with no cure was spreading rapidly. It threatened to weaken his army, but the preventative treatment for this disease was largely unpopular.

Use Mount Vernon's Digital Encyclopedia article “Smallpox” to learn about Washington's challenge:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/smallpox/>

1. What disease was threatening the prospects of success for the American Revolution?
2. Why was the American population particularly susceptible to this disease?
3. Why was George Washington immune to the disease?

4. How did war help spread this disease?
5. What evidence do we have that Washington was concerned about controlling the disease among his troops from the very beginning of his military leadership?
6. How did Washington deal with the 1775 Boston epidemic?
7. How did the disease continue to affect Americans into 1776?

TASK 2:

The preventative treatment for smallpox in Colonial America, unfortunately, was not as easy as swallowing a pill or even getting a shot at the doctor. The treatment was called “inoculation” or “variolation.” Read sequences 12 - 14 of Cotton Mather’s 1721 book *Some account of what is said of inoculating or transplanting the small pox* to learn more about this process: [https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:7910093\\$12i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:7910093$12i)

Tip: This link will take you directly to “Sequence 12.” To read the next two pages, simply click the “Next Page” arrow toward the top of the webpage.

Using the description from Cotton Mather's book, complete the following flowchart to outline the steps of inoculation as practiced in early 18th century America:



TASK 3:

The disease was threatening the Revolutionaries' success. George Washington clearly had to make a decision about the prevention and treatment of smallpox. Read the Army Heritage Center Foundation's article "A Deadly Scourge" to learn more about Washington's decision: <https://www.armyheritage.org/education-and-programs/educational-resources/education-materials-index/50-information/soldier-stories/282-smallpox>

What were the benefits and risks of inoculation that Washington had to weigh?

| Benefits | Risks |
|----------|-------|
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| | |
| | |

1. If you were a Revolutionary soldier, would you have wanted to be inoculated? Why or why not? Cite textual evidence from the websites and/or Cotton Mather's book to support your argument.
2. What did George Washington ultimately decide to do?

TASK 4:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) website to learn more about smallpox's risks and vaccination procedures today: <https://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox/overview/disease-facts.asp>

Summarize the status of smallpox and its prevention today.

TASK 5:

The Revolutionary War was not the only war to be affected by disease and illness. In fact, World War I (WWI) was greatly impacted by an influenza pandemic starting in 1918.

Check out the Public Health Report “The U.S. Military and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919” to learn about the 1918 influenza and its effects on WWI:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862337/?report=reader>

1. How did WWI increase the number of people who got the flu?
2. How did the war widen the scope (or geographical area) of the flu's impact?
3. How did the 1918 flu impact US troop effectiveness?
4. Did more American troops die of the flu or from combat?

5. What were some diseases and infections the US military did not need to worry too much about by WWI?
6. Aside from the flu, what other diseases and infections flourished during WWI?
7. How many productive days did the American Army lose to the flu in 1918 alone?
8. How did WWI make it harder to control the flu pandemic?
9. Click on the line graph at the bottom of the screen ("Figure 2.") Describe at least two reasonable explanations for the spike of deaths.

10. Which of your explanations from Question 9 is the better explanation, and why?

TASK 6:

Investigate PBS's photo gallery showing the "Medical Investigation of Influenza":

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/influenza/>

Using the visual evidence in these photographs, as well as their captions, answer the following questions:

1. Why couldn't doctors and researchers isolate the virus causing the influenza in 1918?
2. What frightening pattern did Surgeon General of the US Army Victor Vaughan observe about the 1918 influenza?
3. What were some methods to try to prevent the spread of the flu in 1918?

4. What deadly flu was discovered in 2004?

5. Do you typically get a flu shot each year? Why or why not?