

May 1st-May Day/Labor Day  
May 5th -Cinco de Mayo  
May 10th-Mothers Day  
May 25th-Memorial Day  
June 14th-Flag Day  
June 20th-First Day of Summer  
June 21st-Father's Day



### Past Pandemics in Massachusetts

By Julia Bloom

As Massachusetts, the United States, and many countries around the world confront the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to remember pandemics of the past and the lessons we can learn from them.

The 1918 flu pandemic, often known as “The Spanish Flu” was one of the most deadly pandemics in world history. It was named after a country which stayed neutral during World War I, and thus had limited censorship rules unlike other countries participating in the war. Thus, news reports focused on the spread of the disease there, leading to the erroneous belief that the flu originated in Spain. News agencies in the countries fighting the war, including the United States, downplayed reports of the virus in their countries as a way of maintaining morale during the war, although this led to misinformation and may have delayed efforts to contain the virus. The censorship may have been due to the Sedition Act of 1918, an extension of the Espionage Act of 1917, that made it illegal for citizens to say or publish anything critical of the US war effort. While experts debate where the pandemic first started even today, it likely mutated from a strain of H1N1 flu in animals to one that infected humans, and it spread rapidly among soldiers in army camps and hospitals fighting in the war. The flu first appeared in the US at Fort Riley, an army base in Haskell County, Kansas, in January 1918. It quickly spread to as far as New York by March. The virus occurred in three waves. The first wave posed the greatest threat to small children under age 2 and older adults over 65. As this wave was relatively mild, it was thought of as no different than the seasonal flu. The second wave of the virus, starting in August 1918, was far more deadly, and disproportionately infected and killed young adults. This wave originated at Camp Devens, an army training camp just outside Boston. This wave would be the deadliest of the three in the United States, killing the majority of the 675,000 people in the country who would die over the course of the epidemic. On September 28th, 1918, the city of Philadelphia held a planned Liberty Loan parade despite warnings from health officials, leading to a massive outbreak of flu in the city. Some cities took efforts to stop the pandemic that are similar to social distancing efforts today, such as closing schools and theaters, forbidding public gatherings, and mandating the wearing of masks. In November of 1918, World War I ended, and many soldiers were shipped home from the battlefields, including those infected with the flu. This led to the third wave of the pandemic in the winter of 1918 and the spring of 1919. Fortunately, the pandemic ended after this third wave as cases dropped due to a possible mutation of the virus into a less virulent strain, though some continued to be infected until 1920. Estimates today indicate that about 500 million people worldwide were infected during the course of the pandemic, with about 20-50 million total deaths. The development of a vaccine for the virus took many years, as early research believed that the pandemic strain of flu was caused by a bacterium, while later research proved it to be a virus, and too small for microscopes in 1919 to detect. The influenza virus was not isolated for study until 1933, and the first flu vaccines were manufactured in the 1940's by Doctors Thomas Francis Jr. and Jonas Salk, who would later help develop a vaccine for Polio. The first approved vaccine was administered to soldiers during World War II, and became available to the general public after the war.

Another deadly disease, Polio, had been a threat to young children in the United States since 1894, when the first epidemic occurred in Vermont. Polio is a highly contagious disease that causes flu-like symptoms, muscle weakness, and permanent paralysis in some cases as the disease kills cells in the spinal column and brain. Polio can also cause Meningitis, or infection of the covering of the spinal cord. Those who recover from Polio can also be affected by symptoms 15-20 years after the first infection, in what is called Post-Polio Syndrome. Polio has been dated to ancient times, as Ancient Egyptian art shows adults with withered limbs and children walking with canes. Roman Emperor Claudius and British author Sir Walter Scott likely had the disease in childhood, and it was first diagnosed by British Doctor Michael Underwood in 1789. Polio outbreaks were small and sporadic until the early 20th century, when improvements in sanitation made it less likely that young children would encounter the disease early, and more likely that they would catch a more dangerous form later in life. Polio would recur in multiple outbreaks and large epidemics, with the first major outbreak occurring in Brooklyn, New York, in 1916. Between the 1940's and 1950's Polio was a major threat to children that peaked in infection rates during the summer, and in 1952 a large scale outbreak infected over 50,000 children in the United States. That same year, Doctor Jonas Salk began testing a Polio vaccine on inhabitants of mental institutions. Salk would soon become the public face of the fight against Polio, although others, such as Albert Sabin, would develop vaccines of their own. Salk's vaccine was proven effective and licenced in 1955 as an injected form with 80-90% effectiveness. In 1959 Sabin began tests of his oral Polio vaccine in the Soviet Union, which was found to give a faster immune response than Salk's vaccine and was easier to administer to young children. Thanks to these vaccines, and the work of organizations including the March of Dimes and the World Health Organization, Polio was eliminated in the Americas in 1994, and efforts to contain it persist worldwide.

Although the situation today with the COVID-19 epidemic is frightening and isolating, there are many organizations that are helping those affected. Local mutual aid organizations in towns and cities across Massachusetts are helping neighbors in need through food donations and financial support. A list of these organizations can be found at <https://www.massjwj.net/news/2020/3/17/cover-19-mutual-aid-networks>. In addition, organizations including the United Way are raising money to support working families and those unemployed by the crisis. The Massachusetts state government is also offering up to date information about the epidemic and aid for those affected at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-updates-and-information>. By working together, Massachusetts can combat the pandemic, while working to help those who are suffering because of it. The Guides Gazette staff encourage our readers to help by washing their hands, social distancing, and contributing to local aid groups. All of our efforts will make a difference.

