



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

COVID-19 and the 1918 Influenza: comparing the physical, social and mental health impacts of two pandemics



© 2020, MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE, INC.

1

Grade Level: MS/HS

Subject Area: Health, Social Studies

Materials: power point that includes answers to worksheet questions and talking points for educators, Lesson Plan description and Worksheet with questions

Learning Objectives

- Learn about the meaning of a pandemic and the origin of both the 1918 Spanish Influenza and COVID-19
- Understand how American society responded to both pandemics as they spread through the country
- Assess the impact both pandemics had/are having on society, and the physical health and mental health of Americans

Briefly review the objectives of the lesson.

What is a pandemic?

How is it different from an epidemic?



Photo
credit:
WEBMD

© 2020, MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE, INC.

3

Questions on worksheet

According to the CDC, an influenza pandemic is a global outbreak of a new influenza virus. Pandemics happen when new (novel) influenza viruses emerge which are able to infect people easily and spread from person to person in an efficient and sustained way.

AN **EPIDEMIC** is a disease that affects a large number of people within a community, population, or region. A **PANDEMIC** is an **epidemic** that's spread over multiple countries or continents. An outbreak is called an epidemic when there is a sudden increase in cases. COVID is the largest pandemic experienced globally since the 1918-19 Influenza.

Where did the Influenza of 1918-19 originate and why is it called the Spanish Flu?

Where did the COVID-19 virus originate?



(photo credit: Marketwatch photo illustration/Getty Images)

© 2020, MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE, INC.

4

Questions on Worksheet

Although there is not universal consensus regarding where the 1918 Influenza virus originated, it spread worldwide during 1918-1919. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in spring 1918. It has been called the Spanish Flu because World War I censors did not want to scare people and minimized early reports. Newspapers were free to report the epidemic's effects in neutral Spain and these stories created a false impression of Spain as especially hard hit. This gave rise to the name "**Spanish**" flu.

COVID-19 began spreading in Wuhan, China in late 2019. When it spread across several countries and affected a large number of people in early 2020 it was classified as a pandemic.

**PHYSICAL HEALTH
IMPACT**



How many people died
worldwide as a result of the
1918-19 Influenza?

How many Americans died?



When young healthy soldiers began getting sick by the dozens in March, 1918, military physicians were unsure about what was causing it. (photo credit: National Archives)

Questions on Worksheet

According to the CDC, it is estimated that about 500 million people or one-third of the world's population became infected with the 1918-19 virus. The number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide, with about 675,000 occurring in the United States. These are staggering numbers when you take into account the fact that the world population in 1918 was 1.8 billion, compared to 7.8 billion in 2020.



A second surge began when the troops returned home at the end of World War I and celebrated their victory with parades. This second wave in the fall of 1918 proved to be much deadlier than the first wave for Americans. (Photo credit: Library of Congress)

Talking Points:

Discuss how the Spanish Flu pandemic spread in the US. The end of World War I led to a resurgence of influenza as people celebrated Armistice Day in the fall of 1918. When soldiers came home and were honored with big parades in cities like Philadelphia the virus spread very quickly, leading to a second more deadly wave of the Influenza that fall. The second wave was the deadliest wave of the influenza¹

Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center



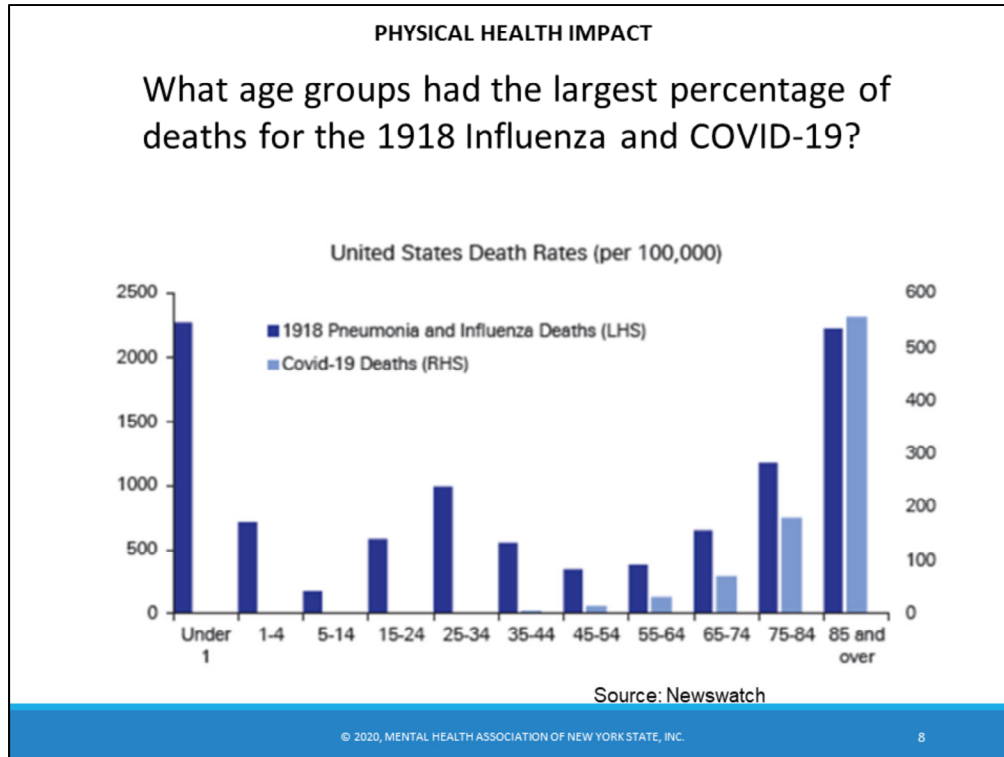
The Johns Hopkins site includes daily updates on global, national and local cases, deaths, testing, and more surrounding COVID-19. Open the link above to see what is happening around the world in real time.

Talking Points:

Have students complete the questions on the worksheet using the Johns Hopkins site.

One thing you may want to point out is that the US has the most cases, but our population isn't nearly as big as other countries with high case counts. For example, the US has a population of 330 million, compared to India at 1.3 billion. However, we have more cases than India.

You can choose to complete these questions together or have them complete the questions on their own and then discuss them. You may also want to have students revisit this site regularly during the school year.



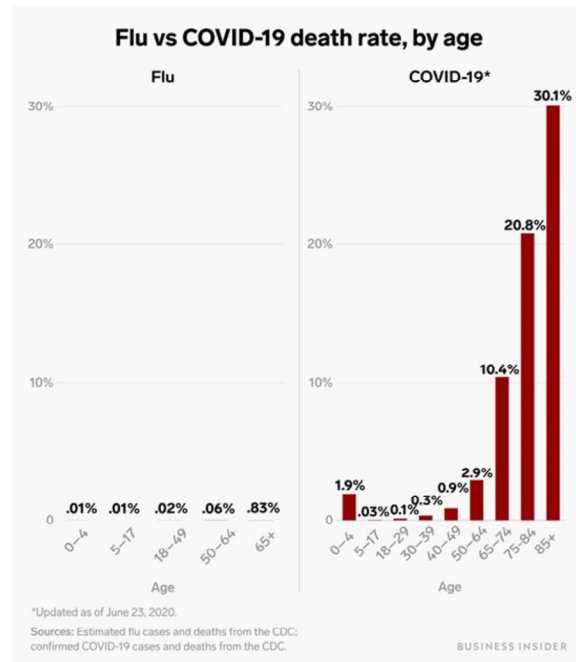
Questions on Worksheet

According to the CDC, the mortality of the Spanish Influenza was highest in people younger than 5 years old, 20-40 years old, and 65 years and older. The high mortality in healthy people, including those in the 20-40 year age group, was a unique feature of this pandemic. Pneumonia was a common immediate cause of death for someone who contracted the virus.

For the COVID pandemic, the mortality rate is highest among the elderly and people with pre-existing conditions like respiratory illness, heart disease and diabetes.

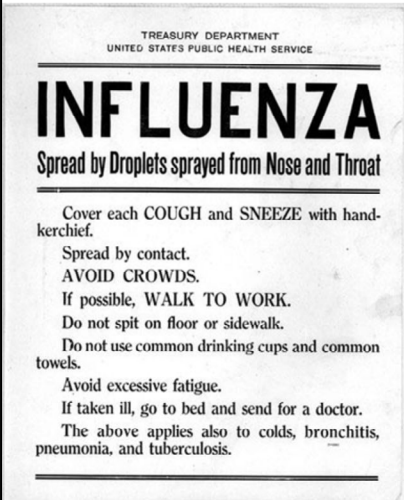
PHYSICAL HEALTH IMPACT

What does this chart tell you about the relationship between age and the death rate of COVID-19 versus the seasonal flu?



Questions on worksheet

The percentage of people who die from the flu is much smaller than from COVID-19. The largest number of deaths from both the flu and COVID-19 are from people 65+. However, the percentage of people infected by COVID-19 who die is much higher for the elderly. For example, 30.1 percent of those 85+ who are infected die from COVID, compared to only .83% from the seasonal flu.



INFLUENZA
Spread by Droplets sprayed from Nose and Throat

Cover each **COUGH** and **SNEEZE** with handkerchief.
Spread by contact.
AVOID CROWDS.
If possible, **WALK TO WORK.**
Do not spit on floor or sidewalk.
Do not use common drinking cups and common towels.
Avoid excessive fatigue.
If taken ill, go to bed and send for a doctor.
The above applies also to colds, bronchitis, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.

The United States Public Health Service issued this pamphlet in October of 1918 as part of a public education campaign to slow the progress of the disease. Credit: Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division

Compare the materials sent out by the national government for both pandemics. The 1918 guidelines are on the left and the COVID-19 guidelines on the right.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORONAVIRUS GUIDELINES FOR AMERICA

DO YOUR PART TO SLOW THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS

Even if you are young, or otherwise healthy, you are at risk and your activities can increase the risk for others. It is critical that you do your part to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

IF YOU WORK IN A CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE INDUSTRY, as defined by the Department of Homeland Security, such as healthcare services and pharmaceutical and food supply, you have a special responsibility to maintain your normal work schedule. You and your employers should follow CDC guidance to protect your health at work.

AVOID SOCIAL GATHERINGS in groups of more than 10 people.

Avoid eating or drinking at bars, restaurants, and food courts — **USE DRIVE-THRU, PICKUP, OR DELIVERY OPTIONS.**

AVOID DISCRETIONARY TRAVEL, shopping trips, and social visits.

DO NOT VISIT nursing homes or retirement or long-term care facilities unless to provide critical assistance.

PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE:

- Wash your hands, especially after touching any frequently used item or surface.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Sneeze or cough into a tissue, or the inside of your elbow.
- Disinfect frequently used items and surfaces as much as possible.


CORONAVIRUS.GOV

The federal Coronavirus Task Force issued this PSA in 2020 about COVID-19.

© 2020, MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE, INC.
10

Question on worksheet


There are some similarities between the two PSAs such as avoid crowds, social gatherings and practicing good hygiene. Point out that you can tell the current PSA is newer because of references to things such as drive-thrus or long-term care facilities.




History.com Children were taught to gargle to help stop the influenza in 1918. (photo credit: History.com)

PHYSICAL HEALTH IMPACT

How might the way we treat an influenza pandemic differ in 2020 than a century ago?



Walter Reed Hospital Flu Ward in Maryland, 1918
(photo credit: Library of Congress)



A health care professional wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) takes the temperature of a potential COVID-19 patient. (photo credit: BCBS.com)

© 2020, MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE, INC.
11

Question on Worksheet

Medical science has advanced greatly in the past century. A hundred years ago we had no vaccines or antibiotics to treat problems associated with disease. We also did not have ventilators so if someone's lungs were in really bad shape we could not save them. There was no personal protective equipment that gives health care professionals much better protection when treating patients. Notice in the photos the health care professional treating a possible COVID-19 patient is not as exposed. Her eyes are covered as well as her hands. We also know much more about the spread of disease today. In addition, a century ago people had less access to medical care or hospitals. It was more typical to stay at home and have your family take care of you. This led to greater spread of disease and sometimes the entire family would die.

KEY TIMES to Practice Social Distancing

Inside your home when someone has, or thinks they have, COVID-19
if possible, stay at least 6 feet away.



CDC

Outside your home
Stay at least 6 feet away from people outside of your household in indoor/outdoor spaces. Stay out of crowded places if possible.



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)

CDC Public Service Announcement, 2020



Baseball game in the summer of 2020. (Photo credit: Bloomberg.com)

SOCIAL IMPACT

What similarities or differences do you notice in how people interacted on three slides about social impact?



Baseball players wearing protective masks during the Influenza of 1918. (photo Credit George Rinhart/Corbis, via Getty Images)

© 2020, MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK STATE, INC.
12

Question on Worksheet

One similarity is the use of masks between people interacting. Also, the benefit of being outdoors is shown in the photos. One difference is the lack of social distancing a century ago. Notice the spectators at the baseball game in 1918 and the people at the outdoor courthouse standing so close together. The people at the courthouse also do not have masks on. Of course, even today not everyone complies with all the recommendations about masks and social distancing.

SOCIAL IMPACT



In San Francisco, police court was held outside. The city Board of Health issued recommendations to the public on how to avoid contracting the influenza. These included avoiding using mass transportation during the rush hour, avoiding crowds and paying attention to personal hygiene. (photo credit: CDC)



In Seattle, Washington, anyone who wanted to ride the street car was required to wear a mask in late 1918. (photo credit: Library of Congress)



A young child wears a mask in 2020 (photo credit: phila.gov)

Question on Worksheet

Refer to previous slide for possible answers

SOCIAL IMPACT



Schools closed for several weeks in Denver, Colorado in the fall of 1918. (photo credit: Library of Congress)



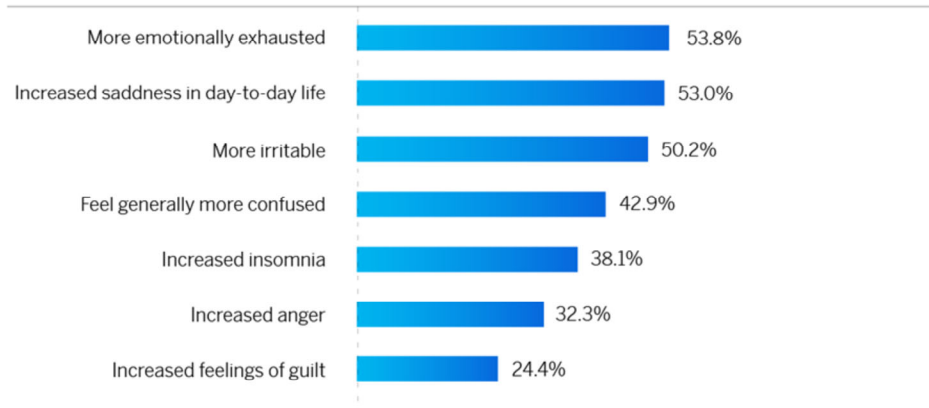
Most schools went to virtual platforms for education when the pandemic began in the United States.

(photo credit: nbcnews.com)

Children in 1918 were also sent home from school but only for a few weeks. It was much harder to have children learn from home a century ago because we didn't have computers where teachers could interact with students. Even 10 years ago this would have been very difficult to accomplish. You can talk about the difficulties of learning remotely and how hard this is for socialization.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT

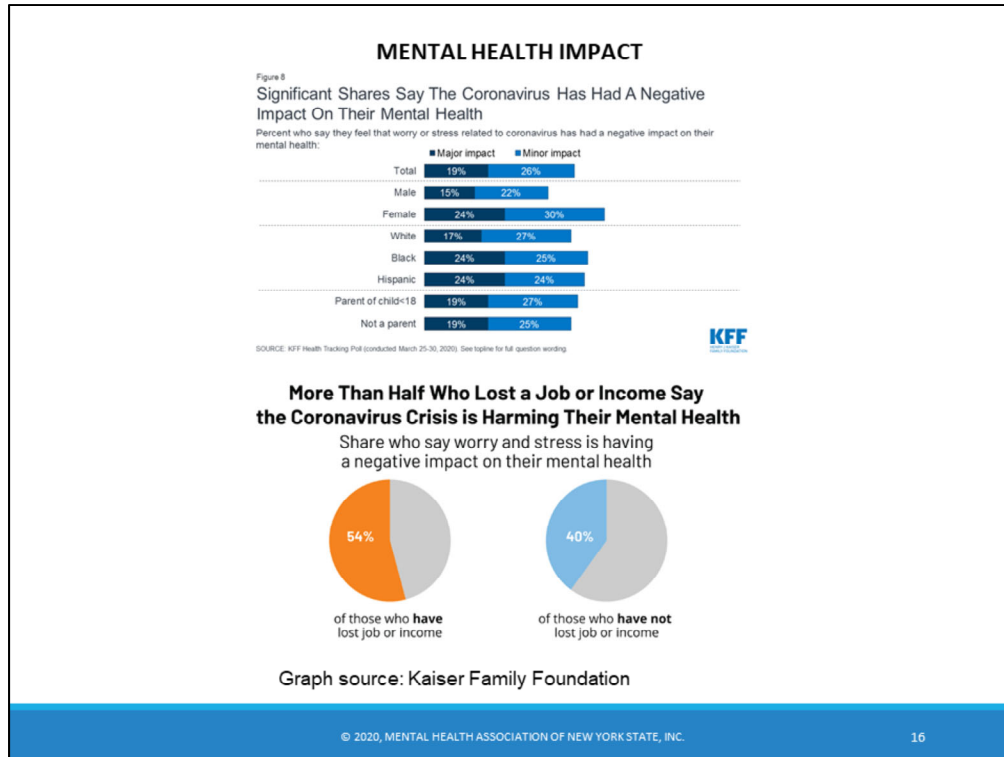
Mental health symptoms since COVID-19 outbreak



Source: Qualtrics.com

Talking Points:

Discuss the survey results with students. This survey is of adults since the pandemic began in the US in March of 2020. You may want to add that many children of all ages may have the same symptoms and be influenced by family members with these symptoms.



Talking Points:

Again, these statistics are about adults. Explain to students after reviewing the graphs that the impact parents/caregivers might be having will also be felt by children. Notice the impact by gender, race and economic situation. Discuss what might account for these differences. The data on this slide provides an opportunity for an educator to discuss the disproportionate income COVID-19 has had on persons of color. The second graph allows for a discussion of how stressful it is for people who have lost a job to take care of their financial obligations during the pandemic.

There is less information available about the mental health impact of both pandemics than about the physical health impact.

Why do you think that is the case?

What impact do you think the Influenza of 1918-19 had on the mental health of children? How about the current COVID-19 pandemic?



Children wear flu masks in Starke, Fl., during the Spanish influenza outbreak of 1918. (photo credit: State Archives of Florida - 1918)



A child working independently in an in-person, socially distanced school setting (photo credit: UNICEF.org)

Question on Worksheet

There are several possibilities to this question. It's hard to quantify impact of mental health. There is often a stigma associated with mental health so many people are reluctant to talk about this. This was even more true in 1918 than today when people felt they weren't supposed to talk about their feelings or mental health.

The Influenza of 1918-19 undoubtedly had a major impact on the mental health of children. Many lost their parents, siblings, grandparents, etc. It was especially hard because so many young people died from the pandemic. There were not many opportunities to seek counseling, especially for people who lived in rural areas. For both pandemics, the isolation children may feel, along with fear, can cause several mental health challenges like anxiety and depression. For people most immediately affected, the loss can be profound causing trauma for children and their families.

This question may be a way for a teacher to open up a discussion or writing prompt for students to reflect on their own feelings about the pandemic.

Resources for extension projects

The Center for Disease Control has a site dedicated to the Influenza of 1918-19 which includes an historical overview, photographs, a timeline and personal stories by survivors. It can be accessed through this [link](#).

Cities throughout New York State were severely impacted by the Influenza of 1918-19. The University of Michigan Center for the History of Medicine and Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, has archived stories about its impact on five cities in the state: New York, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo. These news stories can be downloaded from the following [link](#).

The New York Times has published a site with information and photographs from epidemics over the past century. It is available at this [link](#).

The Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center updates its global statistics on COVID-19 daily. The site includes numerous maps, charts and graphs as well as information and testing, tracking and efforts to discover an effective vaccine. The site is at this [link](#).



The resources on this slide are intended to provide information to teachers who would like to expand student learning on the subject of pandemics.

Thank you!

We hope you found this lesson comparing the pandemics interesting and informative. Visit our website below for more lesson plans and resources for educators, parents and students.

www.mentalhealthEDnys.org



@MHANYSinc



@MHAacrossNYS