



Yale-New Haven  
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **A Minuscule Adversary: Combating Epidemics and Infectious Diseases in America**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 09.05.05

by John K. Laub

Infectious diseases have occurred without warning throughout history, and millions of people have lost their lives because of these epidemics and pandemics. As the nineteenth century came to a close, scientists, with assistance from government funding and private philanthropy in Europe and America, had begun to investigate viruses and bacteria and conducted scientific research in order to better help society combat disease. This unit will explore the various efforts made by social institutions to combat epidemics and infectious diseases during the twentieth century. It will also require students to answer several essential questions, analyze primary sources to illustrate how Americans, the federal government and religious leaders reacted to epidemics in the United States. The unit is centered on the following essential question: How have the federal government and individuals confronted the possibility of infectious diseases devastating their culture and population? Throughout the lessons of the unit, students will employ critical thinking to synthesize historical events with current events in order to make educated decisions affecting all people. Students will debate the role of the federal government, public health officials and the scientific community in studying infectious diseases and preventing their spread. At the conclusion of the unit, students will write an essay answering the following essential question: Is the United States health care system equipped and capable of combating an infectious disease and protecting its citizens' lives?

(Developed for History through Film, grade 12; recommended for Biology and Science, grade 10, and Elective Social Studies, grade 12)

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