
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Tuberculosis in America: The Public Health Response

Essential Question

When dealing with communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, is it ever acceptable to infringe on individual liberties for the sake of public health?

Before you watch

Work with a partner to answer these questions.

1. What is public health?
2. Can you think of a public health campaign to control a disease outbreak that has occurred during your lifetime? Describe the problem and the public health response. How did people react to the campaign?

Vocabulary

Review these vocabulary words and their definitions before watching the video

- **stigma**—a mark of disgrace
- **public health** - organized measures to protect and promote the health of a community
- **hygiene** - practices, such as keeping surroundings clean, to maintain health and prevent disease
- **tuberculosis (TB)** - also known as consumption, tuberculosis is an infectious disease that primarily affects the lungs
- **contagious**- able to be transmitted from one person to another by close contact

While You Watch

Look for answers to these questions while watching the video. You may watch the video more than once and consult the [transcript](#).

1. What sorts of measures did officials advocate to try to stop the spread of tuberculosis?
2. How did socioeconomic status affect a person's chances of getting tuberculosis? If so, explain how.
3. How did the public health response vary across different socioeconomic groups? If so, explain how.

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After You Watch

Answer the following questions.

1. How did a tuberculosis patient's wealth, race, and status in society affect the chances that his or her individual rights would be compromised for the good of the public? Explain.
2. Describe the positive and negative aspects of the public health campaign against tuberculosis. Compare that situation to another, more recent, public health issue that you are aware of (such as obesity, diabetes, HIV, flu, or mandatory school vaccinations).
3. Do you think public health measures are an infringement on individual rights? Explain.
4. One of the banners in this clip called for a "war against tuberculosis." Why do you think that phrase was used? In our era, "wars" have been declared against many different kinds of "enemies." Do you think that those usages have been appropriate? Explain.