

UNH Historian Available to Comment On Lessons Learned from End of 1918 Pandemic

Thursday, February 10, 2022

⋮



MEDIA RELATIONS

DURHAM, N.H.—Molly Dorsey, associate professor of history at the University of New Hampshire and an expert on the 1918 flu pandemic who frequently speaks about the infectious disease, is available to discuss similarities between the pandemics of the 1918 influenza and the recent COVID-19 virus and if there are any lessons to be learned for the future.

“There are clearly similarities, like the resistance to wearing masks, the use of isolation practices and the willingness to try experimental treatments or preventions,” said Dorsey. “If history repeats itself, there probably won’t be any dramatic or memorable declaration that the current pandemic has come to an end. The 1918 influenza pandemic never really went away, it is still around today. The COVID-19 virus will probably do the same—not ending with a clear and defining event but more likely fading away—with variants possibly lingering even as case numbers go down and mandates lifted. As with the 1918 pandemic, it will most likely be a human decision, not a disease decision.”

Dorsey can be reached at Marion.Dorsey@unh.edu or (603) 862-3014.

Dorsey explains that there are public health practices today that could be seen during the 1918 pandemic. For example, covering sneezes with a hand or cloth, discouraging spitting, public health advertisements and the acceptance of isolation or staying home when sick all appeared in many areas of the country. She also notes the differences in the acceptance of knowledge held by medical professionals, then and now, and the prominence of the political divide during the recent pandemic.

Similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 1918 there was also a shift in the way people worked, although the shift included women leaving the home to go work in factories and other industries to fill positions left by men who were fighting overseas in World War I. During the recent pandemic, the focus was more on working from home and this time more women dropped out of the workforce all together because of childcare issues.

The influenza pandemic came at the end of the First World War and spread globally because of the number of troops fighting around the world. As Dorsey describes it, it was hard to socially distance in the trenches. While the pandemic caused millions of additional deaths, the emphasis was on the war. She points to the fact that there are very few 1918 pandemic historical monuments around the world but many in remembrance of World War I, highlighting that while the flu dominated attention for a while, the war took precedence.

The [University of New Hampshire](#) inspires innovation and transforms lives in our state, nation and world. More than 16,000 students from all 50 states and 71 countries engage with an award-winning faculty in top-ranked programs in business, engineering, law, health and human services, liberal arts and the sciences across more than 200 programs of study. A Carnegie Classification R1 institution, UNH partners with NASA, NOAA, NSF and NIH, and received \$260 million in competitive external funding in FY21 to further explore and define the frontiers of land, sea and space.

- **Media Contact**

[Robbin Ray '82](#) | Communications and Public Affairs | robbin.ray@unh.edu | 603-862-4864



University of New Hampshire

UNH Today is produced for the UNH community and for friends of UNH.
The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).
Email us: unhtoday.editor@unh.edu.

[MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION](#) [CONTACT US](#)

Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Follow us on YouTube

Follow us on Instagram

Find us on LinkIn

UNH Today RSS feeds

UNH Today • UNH Main Directory: 603-862-1234
Copyright © 2022 • TTY Users: 7-1-1 or 800-735-2964 (Relay NH)
[USNH Privacy Policies](#) • [USNH Terms of Use](#) • [ADA Acknowledgement](#)