

## Smallpox in 1721 Boston: Leadership for You Today

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## Smallpox in 1721 Boston: Leadership for You Today

- Welcome
- Today we're looking at leadership in a public health emergency
- 4 leaders
- 5 takeaways

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- Boston in 1721
- 11,000 people
- Health care
- Apothecary, surgeon, and physician
- 10-15 physicians; 1 with a degree
- Most believed in balancing 4 elements in the body
- Impact of smallpox in North America – 5,000,000 natives in 1492 but 600,000 in 1721; trend for epidemic every 12 years

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- Outbreak in May 1721 – British ship *Seahorse*
- 10% of Boston's population has smallpox by early September 1721
- Within a month smallpox has spread to 25% of the population
- Disappears in May 1722 – 844 dead and 5980 had disease

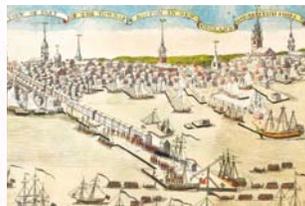
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From First State Department of Health Photograph



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- As dramatic as the numbers are, an even more dramatic part of the event is leadership
- Leadership affects the appearance of the disease, the spread of the disease, and the departure of the disease
- Everyone in this room fits into a prepared emergency or disaster response plan
- But none of these plans account for leadership – ultimately, you will determine extent of leadership

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- **Leader #1 – Cotton Mather**
- He learns about the practice of inoculation (then unheard-of in Europe and North America)
- Urges fellow doctors to 1) study inoculation and 2) to adopt its use
- After four months, becomes public advocate for inoculation, sends son for treatment
- Home is target for mob protests and explosions
- Afterward: reduces his involvement in public issues and causes

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- **Leader #2 – Elisha Cooke, Jr.**
- Learns about inoculation from fellow members of the town council and legislature
- Orders officials and residents to rely on Boston's highly advanced "response system"
- Inserts articles into newspapers seeking to discredit supporters of inoculation and to reassure the public
- Drops opposition to inoculation after a colleague on the council seeks treatment
- Afterward: maintains role as public and private leader

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- **Leader #3 – Dr. William Douglas**
- Learns about inoculation in conversation with Mather, also receives Mather's letters
- Leads a town council inquiry of the primary supporters of inoculation
- Persuades members to adopt a charge of murder
- Assists in writing articles against inoculation
- Afterward: becomes champion of inoculation in next epidemic

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- **Leader #4 – Dr. Zabdiel Boylston**
- Learns about inoculation from Mather's letters
- Experiments with inoculation on son and slave
- Target for council investigation that charges him with murder
- Begins inoculation, stops after protests, and begins again after British king announces the use of inoculation with prisoners
- Afterward: continues with inoculation and writes first major book on the practice

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- **Five Paddles**
- 1. The event collides with an existing set of leadership relations
- 2. The value of a new idea has no relationship to the status of its source (Cotton Mather)
- 3. A best practice is the earliest form of an outdated practice (Elisha Cooke)
- 4. A profession can produce an agenda (William Douglass)
- 5. There is a link between the controversy of a new approach and the extent of personal risk (Zabdiel Boylston)

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- **Questions, Reactions, and Comments**
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- Thank You

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