

# Heritage: What does a Pioneer Need to Know to Survive?

## Summary

Cholera, dysentery, hypothermia, Rocky Mountain Fever, malnutrition, and even fatigue were health dangers along the trek. The odds of survival along the Mormon Trail would be greater if pioneers followed certain health precautions.

## Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

## Group Size

Individual

## Background for Teachers

Most of the deaths occurring on the trail were caused by disease and poor health practices. Outbreaks of cholera, problems with poor diets, and physical exhaustion were common.

Examining the lifestyles of the pioneers allows students to see how they differ from today's health practices.

## Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will identify health problems of the Mormon trek and recognize ways they could have been avoided.

## Instructional Procedures

A person who suffered from the 'bloody flux' (cholera) could start out the morning with a slight fever, be too sick to walk with diarrhea and vomiting by noon, and die by evening. When a person suffers from scurvy, often after traveling across the ocean, then traveling across country without sufficient fruits or vegetables with vitamin C, their teeth could fall out, open sores don't heal, and they ache all over. Trying to push a handcart through the Nebraska sand dunes on only 1200 calories a day means that the person's body must cannibalize their muscles to survive because they aren't getting enough food to pay for their exertions. They are slowly starving to death. How many pioneers suffered these problems?

Refer to the Heritage Gateways list of essential questions and themes. Show students internet sites for finding information about pioneer health and diet. Divide up the search for diseases and diet problems among groups or individuals. Have them search for incidents, causes, and outcomes. Compile numbers if possible. Have students share their findings with the entire class. Have them determine the possible preventative steps pioneers could have taken to eliminate or remediate the health problem.

## Extensions

Re-enact a triage simulation with 'pioneers' suffering various symptoms (ones that they have researched), while other students try to determine what is wrong and what can be done.

## Assessment Plan

Have students fill out brief notecards or slips of paper of the most remarkable information about their disease or health issue that they have read about that day. This keeps them on task and accountable for reading and understanding things, particularly if they are using the internet.

Authors

[JEAN MCPHERRON](#)