

Name _____



Ellis Island Checkups

For millions of immigrants, Ellis Island was the first stop on their journey to a new life in the United States. But before they could enter, they had to pass a medical inspection. This process was meant to protect public health, but it also caused stress and worry for many families.

The "Six-Second Exam"

When immigrants arrived at Ellis Island, they were carefully observed by doctors. The first check was called the "six-second exam" because it was so quick. Doctors looked at

immigrants as they walked up the stairs, checking for signs of illness, weakness, or trouble walking. Anyone who looked sick was marked with chalk on their clothing and sent for further inspection.

Medical Tests and Challenges

After the quick check, some immigrants had to go through a longer medical exam. Doctors checked their eyes, lungs, and overall health. One of the most feared tests was for trachoma, a serious eye disease. If a doctor found signs of trachoma, the immigrant could be sent back to their home country. Other illnesses, such as tuberculosis or contagious diseases, could also lead to deportation.

Many immigrants were frightened of the medical exams. Some had never seen a doctor before, and they feared being separated from their families. If a person was sick but could recover, they were kept in the Ellis Island hospital until they got better. However, about 2% of immigrants were sent back, meaning they could not enter the U.S.

The Impact on Immigrants

For most people, the medical inspection was a small challenge before starting their new lives. Once they passed, they could move forward and settle in cities like New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. However, for those who failed, it was heartbreaking. Families were sometimes separated, and people who had spent all their savings to come to America had to return home.

Although the inspections were strict, they helped keep diseases from spreading and ensured that new immigrants were healthy enough to work and live in their new country. Today, Ellis Island stands as a museum, reminding people of the hardships and hopes of those who passed through its doors.