

# INFLUENZA PANDEMIC OF 1918–19

The most severe influenza outbreak of the 20th century and, in total number of deaths, among the most devastating pandemics in human history

## WHAT IS INFLUENZA?

Disease caused by a virus transmitted between people by airborne respiratory secretions

## WHAT IS A PANDEMIC?

Outbreak of infectious disease that occurs over a wide geographical area and that is of high prevalence, generally affecting a significant proportion of the world's population, usually over the course of several months

## ORIGINS

No universal consensus

## WHAT DO WE KNOW NOW?

H1N1 virus with genes of avian origin

## SYMPTOMS



## WHY WAS IT CALLED THE SPANISH FLU?

Initial reports of mass illness first appeared in Spanish newspapers. During World War I, Spain was neutral and could report freely while combatant countries censored news of the flu.



## HOW DID IT SPREAD SO QUICKLY?

- World War I placed large numbers of people close to one another
- 30% of U.S. physicians were deployed
- Health services were limited
- Medical technology and countermeasures were limited or nonexistent
- No diagnostic tests or vaccines existed
- Doctors didn't know influenza viruses existed
- No coordinated pandemic plans existed

## THE PANDEMIC OCCURRED IN THREE WAVES

### MARCH 1918

- Comparatively mild
- Spread through western Europe during World War I

### AUGUST 1918

- More lethal
- Quickly caused pneumonia

Camp Devens, Massachusetts:  
6,674 cases existed 6 days after the first case

### WINTER–SPRING 1919

- Added to death toll
- Subsided in summer 1919

## DEATHS IN THE UNITED STATES

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC OF 1918–19

675,000

WORLD WAR I 116,516

WORLD WAR II

292,131

Unusually, nearly half of all deaths occurred in healthy people

20–40 years old

## DEATHS AROUND THE WORLD

1 person icon = 1 million people

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25 million

WORLD WAR I

8.5 million

By some estimates, 40–50 million may have died

WORLD WAR II

19.4 million

## WORST PANDEMICS

1 person icon = 5 million deaths

BLACK DEATH

25 million (by some estimates, 50 million)

INFLUENZA PANDEMIC OF 1918–19

25 million (by some estimates, 40–50 million)

HIV/AIDS

35 million

ANTONINE PLAGUE

5 million

