



1918 Flu Pandemic (Spanish Flu)

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

While World War I was taking millions of lives across Europe, influenza was taking millions more around the world. The first confirmed case of flu was in Fort Riley, Kansas, in March 1918, but cases may have occurred in France as early as late 1917. When the soldiers stationed in Fort Riley were shipped out, they took the flu with them, causing it to spread. This first strain was followed by a much worse strain in August 1918, which hit young adults aged 20-40 especially hard. Most countries at war downplayed the flu's effects so as to not affect morale, but Spain was not involved in the fighting and reported openly about the flu. This led to the nickname Spanish Flu as many believed it had hit Spain harder. The flu's infection rate was 50%, and it killed up to 20% of those infected (a typical strain of flu kills 0.1%). In the United States, the outbreak lasted nine months, infecting 28% of the population, killing 500,000-675,000 and dropping life expectancy by 12 years. In 1918, 57,000 American soldiers had died from the flu, 4,000 more than were killed in the war. As quickly as the flu outbreak started, it ended, leaving 50-100 million around the world dead, a full 3-5% of the world's population. Most deaths were from complications of the flu, such as hemorrhaging or pneumonia.

Important Dates

- March 11, 1918: First confirmed diagnosis of first strain of flu in Fort Riley, Kansas.
- August 1918: More powerful second strain of flu appears in France, Sierra Leone and Massachusetts.
- September 6, 1918: First cases of the second strain in the United States at a naval facility in Boston.
- November 1918: Second strain spreads from France to Spain but soon stops.
- Late 1918-March 1919: Third wave strikes. It is as deadly as the second wave, but strikes unevenly.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: Spanish flu, Spanish influenza, influenza, flu epidemic.
- Limit your search by date to find information about this specific flu outbreak, or by state to track the flu's movements in that area of the country.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- ["237 Deaths in Army"](#) *Topeka State Journal* (Topeka, KS), April 4, 1918, Image 2, col. 5.
- ["Weekly War News Digest"](#) *Greenville Journal* (Greenville, OH), April 18, 1918, Image 1, col. 1-2.
- ["State Health Dept. is Working to Bar Spanish Influenza"](#) *Democratic Banner* (Mt. Vernon, OH), September, 24, 1918, Image 2, col. 5.
- ["Spanish Influenza' – 'Three-Day Fever' – 'The Flu'"](#) *Herald and News* (Newberry, SC), October 15, 1918, Image 2, col. 1-4.
- ["Reported Cases Stand at 65,000"](#) *Celina Democrat* (Celina, OH), October 18, 1918, Image 5, col. 2.
- ["No Issue This Date—Influenza"](#) *Bamberg Herald* (Bamberg, SC), November 21, 1918, Image 1.
- ["Flu Ban Lifted in Mt. Vernon by Board of Health"](#) *Democratic Banner* (Mt. Vernon, OH), November 26, 1918, Image 5, col. 1.
- ["The Flu as Told by Knowing One"](#) *Celina Democrat* (Celina, OH), December 6, 1918, Image 1, col. 4.
- ["Advice to 'Flu' Convalescents"](#) *Celina Democrat* (Celina, OH), December 13, 1918, Image 4, col. 1-2.