

New Zealand Society of Genealogists



THE 1918-1919 FLU PANDEMIC – THE ‘GREAT FLU’

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FAMILY HISTORY - PRESERVING OUR PAST FOR THE FUTURE



INFLUENZA

FREQUENTLY COMPLICATED WITH

PNEUMONIA

IS PREVALENT AT THIS TIME THROUGHOUT AMERICA.

THIS THEATRE IS CO-OPERATING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.

YOU MUST DO THE SAME

IF YOU HAVE A COLD AND ARE COUGHING AND
SNEEZING DO NOT ENTER THIS THEATRE

GO HOME AND GO TO BED UNTIL YOU ARE WELL

Coughing, Sneezing or Spitting Will Not Be
Permitted In The Theatre. In case you
must cough or sneeze, do so in your own hand-
kerchief, and if the Coughing or Sneezing
Persists Leave The Theatre at Once.

This Theatre has agreed to cooperate with
the Department Of Health in disseminating
the truth about Influenza, and thus serve
a great educational purpose.

**HELP US TO KEEP CHICAGO THE
HEALTHIEST CITY IN THE WORLD**

JOHN DILL ROBERTSON
COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

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World Wide Facts



- Killed more people than the Great war (20 – 30 Million people)
- Most devastating pandemic in recorded history
- One fifth of the worlds population was infected.
- Most deadly for those aged between 20 – 40





When did the pandemic begin?



- January February 1918 – USA
- March – Camp Funston(Kansas) thousands of soldiers affected
- USA soldiers spread the flu to France
- French army – April
- British Army – May – July
- Gradually spread around the globe



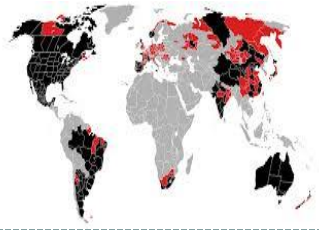


What is influenza?



- Influenza is a viral infection of the respiratory tract – *(described by Hippocrates in 412 BC)*
- The virus is very small, and has exceptional reproductive versatility
- Influenza is often confused with the ‘common cold’
- Pneumonia can be a serious complication of influenza





A 'Pandemic' v an 'epidemic'



- The key difference is one of scale and location
- A pandemic is when the **same disease** affects people at the **same time** in many countries **around the world**
- An epidemic is when a **disease** affects many people at the **same time** in a **community , institution or country**

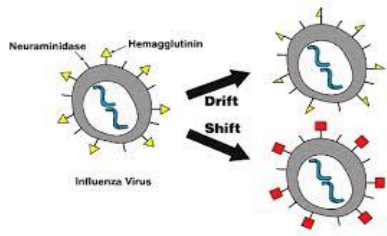


What was the cause of this pandemic?



- Another example of different views:
 - ✧ *Was it from unprecedented numbers of young men brought together?*
 - ✧ *Was it linked to troop ships / army camps / wide spread travel?*
 - ✧ *Was it linked to crowds celebrating the end of the war?*





What was the cause of this pandemic?

- Another example of different views:
 - ✧ *Was there a link to China? (bird flu) ?*
 - ✧ *Was it an antigenic 'drift' - gradual and subtle variations in the evolution of the virus (why you need 'flu shots' every year)*
 - ✧ *Was it an antigenic 'shift' sudden and major change – genetic re-assortment.*



Results of a Royal Commission of enquiry



- The cause was a virulent new infection introduced from overseas
- The Health Department was unprepared
- Quarantine restrictions were casual and unsatisfactory (unlike Australia)
- A major reorganisation of health administration resulted.





Why was it called 'Black Death'?



- The membrane lining the lungs is damaged and blood/fluid fills the air spaces
- Oxygen exchange is reduced
- The skin loses its normal colour and turns a dusky purple
- This is called 'cyanosis'
- The discolouration is an ominous sign and becomes even more pronounced after death





A young nun's story



- The nun was told to sit by a dying man
- She thought he was breathing normally (a big strong healthy young man) until suddenly he gave a great gulp and before her very eyes,
- 'he turned jet-black, not blue or purple, but black like a Negro' (page 24- 'Black November')





NZ Life in November 1918!



- Ordinary life was impossible
- Shops offices and factories shut down
- Schools hotels and theatres were closed
- Shipping came to a halt
- Shortages of basics
- Pressure on hospitals





Number of deaths

(reference *Black November* by G W Rice)



- 8,573 people died
- North Island – 4,051
- South Island – 2,040
- High level of Maori deaths 2,160
- Majority of European deaths were urban dwellers





Auckland



- The ship *Niagara*
- Red Cross, St John Ambulance Association, Army Medical corps
- Auckland hospital was overcrowded
- Victoria Park – a temporary morgue
- Temporary influenza hospitals opened
- Largest death toll (1,128)



Waikumete cemetery memorial



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Thames – memorial to a nurse



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Armistice day - Ida Reilly

(Auckland telephone operator)



- “As if by magic Queen Street just filled with people. It was one mass of laughing, crying, coughing and obviously sick people. Was it really the armistice or was it just a chance to get out of the house, even if I die, just let me see and hear people's voices again.....

the feeling of elation on the air that morning was just marvellous”





Wellington



- There was a significant delay in preparing for this emergency(due to political wrangling especially between the Minister of Health and the Wellington Mayor)
- This lead to Wellington having the highest city death rate
- There was an acute shortage of Doctors and volunteer helpers



Wellington



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Wellington



- Karori cemetery
- City Council workmen dug long trenches to cope with the extraordinary mortality
- Each burial separately marked and recorded
- Only two cremations as opposed to hundreds of burials (Cremations had to be specified in the deceased's Will)





Christchurch



- Linwood cemetery – filled so rapidly it had to be closed
- Bromley cemetery – new site
- Peak mortality – 19 November – (48 deaths)





Dunedin



- The least severe epidemic of New Zealand's four main cities
- Many unmarked flu epidemic graves at Dunedin's Anderson's Bay cemetery
- Peak mortality on 26 November (16 deaths)
- Some landlords evicted tenants who developed the flu



Anderson's Bay cemetery



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Maori death rates



- Maori were seven times more likely than Europeans to die from the flu
- Maori settlements were totally unprepared
- A grim test of Maori and Pakeha relations resulted
- Dr Maui Pomare (MP for western Maori and Minister of Maori affairs played a major role
- Tahupotiki Wirimu Ratana began his healing ministry during the flu pandemic



Souviens!



- In two months New Zealand lost about half as many people to influenza as it had in the whole of the First World War.
- No event has killed so many New Zealanders in such a short time.
- While nearly every NZ town has a first world war memorial there are scarcely any public monuments to the victims of the worst modern disease disaster - overcome and forgotten.

