

## Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918

The deadliest virus in modern history, perhaps of all time, was the 1918 Spanish Flu. It killed about 20 to 50 million people worldwide, perhaps more. The total death toll is unknown because medical records were not kept in many areas.

The pandemic hit during World War I and devastated military troops. In the United States, for instance, more servicemen were killed from the flu than from the war itself. The Spanish flu was fatal to a higher proportion of young adults than most flu viruses.

The pandemic started mildly, in the spring of 1918, but was followed by a much more severe wave in the fall of 1918. The war likely contributed to the devastating mortality numbers, as large outbreaks occurred in military forces living in close quarters. Poor nutrition and the unsanitary conditions of war camps had an effect.

A third wave occurred in the winter and spring of 1919, and a fourth, smaller wave occurred in a few areas in spring 1920. Initial symptoms of the flu were typical: sore throat, headache, and fever. The flu often progressed rapidly to cause severe pneumonia and sometimes hemorrhage in the lungs and mucus membranes. A characteristic feature of severe cases of the Spanish Flu was heliotrope cyanosis, where the patient's face turned blue from lack of oxygen in the cells. Death usually followed within hours or days.

Modern medicine such as vaccines, antivirals, and antibiotics for secondary infections were not available at that time, so medical personnel couldn't do much more than try to relieve symptoms.

The flu ended when it had infected enough people that those who were susceptible had either died or developed immunity.

### Did you understand the text?

#### 1) Which pandemic is the deadliest in modern history?

- a) The bubonic plague in the 14th century
- b) The Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic in 1793
- c) The Spanish Flu in 1918
- d) The Covid-19 coronavirus in 2020

#### 2) The Spanish Flu pandemic occurred during which war?

- a) The French Revolution
- b) The Spanish-American War
- c) World War I
- d) World War II

#### 3) Where did the Spanish flu originate?

- a) Spain
- b) United States
- c) Italy
- d) That information is not provided

## More questions about the text:

### 4) Why are total deaths for the Spanish Flu not known?

- a) No one cared because of the war
- b) Many areas did not keep medical records
- c) Most medical records were destroyed in the war
- d) No one wants to know how bad it was

### 5) When was the first wave of the Spanish Flu pandemic?

- a) Spring 1918
- b) Summer 1918
- c) Fall 1918
- d) Winter 1918

### 6) What contributed to deaths from the flu in military personnel?

- a) Close quarters
- b) Poor nutrition
- c) Unsanitary conditions
- d) All of the above

### 7) What is a characteristic feature of serious cases of the Spanish Flu?

- a) Coma
- b) Face turning blue
- c) Liver failure
- d) Extremely high fever

### 8) What caused the Spanish Flu pandemic to end?

- a) They created a vaccine for it
- b) Improved medical care
- c) The end of the war caused better conditions
- d) Those who were susceptible had either died or were immune