

# PANDEMIC

**Pandemic:** An outbreak of disease that spreads quickly over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population.

The Spanish Flu of 1918 was such a pandemic that claimed millions of lives worldwide.

History provides us lessons that can be learned from the 1918 pandemic to help us as individuals and communities cope effectively with the COVID 19 virus.



Source: Wikipedia.org

Soldiers from Fort Riley, Kansas, ill with Spanish flu at a hospital ward at Camp Funston



# 1918 Pandemic – Spanish Influenza

- Killed more people than the Great War (WWI); at least 50 million
- Circled the globe, following the path of human carriers
- Infected over 500 million people, a third of the world's population at the time
- Duration: The pandemic lasted about 15 months, ended in the summer of 1919



Source: Archyde.com

Burying the dead during the 1918 Pandemic



# Pandemic Reaches the United States

- First wave of the virus appeared in United States in the spring of 1918 in Kansas and in military camps
- Few noticed the epidemic at the time because of the war
- No response to epidemic in military camps in March and April
- A second wave of the virus occurred in the fall of 1918; the end of the war enabled a resurgence
- On November 11, 1918, Americans celebrated Armistice Day with parades and large parties. As a result, millions (28%) of Americans were infected and an estimated 675,000 died



Source: Library of Congress

A girl tries to comfort her sister, November 1918



# Public Health Response

- The response based upon the medical and scientific conception of influenza
- Aim: To reduce the transmission of the virus by preventing contact
- Efforts to contain contagion were organized to prevent those infected from sharing the same air as the uninfected
- Public gathering and coming together of people in close quarters was seen as a potential agency for the transmission of the virus
- Measures required sacrifice of individual liberty for the common good



Source: Pinterest.com

Family, including their cat don face masks during the pandemic



# Public Health Measures

- Large public gatherings limited
- Saloons, dance halls and cinemas closed
- Churches allowed to remain open but only minimum services could be conducted
- Gauze masks were distributed to be worn in public
- Stores could not hold sales; then staggered opening of stores and factories
- Funerals were limited to 15 minutes
- Some towns required a signed certificate to enter; railroads would not accept passengers without them
- Those who ignored the ordinances had to pay steep fines enforced by extra officers
- Quarantine and isolation of the ill



Seattle Daily Times from October 5, 1918

Source: newspapers.com



# Similarities/ Differences Between 1918 and 2020 Pandemics

- Both visible in the Spring (March) in United States
- Both spread by human contact; through the air by coughing and sneezing
- Most common sign of infection in both fever (100-104 F)
- 1918 virus most deadly for those 20-40
- 2020 virus most deadly for those 60+ especially with pre-existing health conditions
- 2020 virus is less fatal but more contagious than 1918 virus



Source: Univ of Waterloo – WKRG News

Nothing has changed in 102 years



# Lessons from 1918 Pandemic

- Experiences of two American cities, both hit by epidemic in 1918-19
- Philadelphia: Liberty Loan Parade held; crowds lined the streets for the huge military parade; in 72 hours 2600 people died
- St. Louis: Social distancing began and was enforced early; schools, libraries, churches and playgrounds were closed; limited number of people on street cars and staggered work shifts to limit contact
- The curve flattened, few cases and deaths; 1/8 the death rate of Philadelphia, however, social distancing rolled back too early and death rates went up
- Lesson: Social distancing is crucial to prevent the spread of the virus



Source: thecut.com



# Take Away

History tells us to:

- Practice social distancing
- Wear a mask in public
- Maintain proper rest, nutrition, good hygiene, get fresh air.

Consider from historical experience in 1918-19:

- Understand we can adapt
- Collective action for the common good is absolutely possible



**Until we are able to open,  
Blanchard House Museum  
wishes you and yours  
to be safe and stay healthy**

