

Spanish Flu Fact Sheet

- The Spanish Flu **struck in several waves** starting in early 1918 and continuing into 1920.
- The first major wave was in the fall of 1918; the second was in the spring and summer of 1919; and the third was in early 1920.
- The Spanish Flu **had little to do with Spain**, despite its name.
 - Wartime censorship prevented most of the major countries involved in World War I from accurately reporting on how widespread it was. The Spanish press, however, was not censored – as a result, more reporting happened on the flu there, and therefore it seemed that Spain was particularly affected.
- The Spanish Flu was **particularly dangerous for young, otherwise healthy adults**. This was not the normal demographic pattern for the influenza of earlier pandemics.
- A young Walt Disney caught it, as did Amelia Earhart, and likely Canada’s own Colonel John MacRae.
- The **war affected the spread of the disease**: it was carried across oceans on ships full of soldiers, and across Canada on trains bearing troops.
- It infected 10 times more people than it eventually killed.
- Early symptoms could be deceptively mild; however, **it struck fast**, and could kill within a matter of days.
- A flu **pandemic today could kill as many as 80 million people** worldwide.
 - Even with what we know about the Spanish Flu, there is tremendous uncertainty about the statistics associated with mortality and morbidity.
- The flu strain associated with the Spanish Flu, H1N1, is **closely related to many of the flu strains that spread today**.
 - Indeed, “**Swine Flu**,” the flu strain that spread across the world in 2009, was an H1N1 flu as well.
- The Spanish Flu pandemic changed Canada.
 - It was directly **responsible for the creation of a federal Department of Health**.
 - **Disease prevention became a priority**, rather than disease management.
 - The experience of the Spanish Flu pandemic convinced Canadians that **illnesses like this were a community problem**, rather than an individual one.