

A Brief History of Influenza

Infectious diseases are a fact of life. Some, like smallpox, have been all but eradicated. Others, like yellow fever, have been brought largely under control. Only one such highly communicable disease continues to pose a threat to large numbers of people. Influenza has been called The Last Great Plague. It is one of the ten leading causes of death in the United States (in the form of pneumonia-influenza), and has an even higher mortality rate in many developing nations around the world.

Influenza ranks among the three most deadly outbreaks of infectious disease in all of recorded history. The first most deadly infectious disease was the Plague of Justinian in 542 AD, which claimed the lives of 100 million people. Second was the Black Death, or Bubonic Plague, which killed about a third of the population of Europe (more than 62 million people) from 1347-1351. The third most deadly outbreak of infectious disease was the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919. Though the final death toll will never be known, it is believed to have killed at least 40 million people.

Within a few short months, the Spanish Influenza killed more people than any other disease of such short duration in the history of the world. Those who survived a bout of the Spanish Influenza typically endured a long, slow recovery. Many people who survived a run-in with the Spanish Influenza suffered long-term complications, such as encephalitis and post-encephalitic Parkinson's. Ultimately these complications claimed an additional half million lives from 1919-1928.

Worldwide, influenza remains one of the leading causes of death. Despite ongoing efforts to prevent it, deadly strains of influenza continue to sweep around the world. Efforts to find an effective preventive for influenza virus are hindered by the flu's ability to constantly evolve into new combinations—what researchers call re-assortment. Each new combination is different, which means that it has probably never been “seen” by anyone's immune system. This kind of viral evolution, called antigenic shift, happens very quickly. It continually presents us with unique viral strains for which our immune systems have no antibodies. The influenza vaccine has far from eradicated influenza because of the virus's ability to mutate. Long-term consequences of the vaccine are not known. Very young children, elderly people, and people with chronic respiratory problems are most at risk for complications from influenza. As they did after the Spanish Influenza, many people attribute the onset of long-term health conditions, such as asthma and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, to a recent bout of influenza.

During the Spanish Influenza of 1918-1919, homeopaths reported extraordinary results (with almost no deaths or long-term consequences) in people who were treated exclusively with homeopathy. Today, as then, homeopathy offers hope for those who are concerned about influenza. With a homeopathic medicine (called a remedy), influenza typically resolves faster and more completely, with fewer complications. If a case of influenza is not severe and the person is already receiving regular homeopathic care, an extra dose of his/her regular remedy may be all that is needed. If a person is extremely ill or is not already getting regular homeopathic care, a remedy selected on the basis of the person's influenza symptoms will be needed.

Ultimately, the best defense against influenza is a healthy immune system. One of the best ways to achieve an optimal level of health is with regular homeopathic care.

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