“All the City Was Dying”
The Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918-1919

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Econ Focus
https://www.richmondfed.org/publications/research/econ_focus
U.S. Life Expectancy at Birth 1900-2016

Source: CDC
Spanish Flu Mortality

Worldwide: 50-100 million
United States: 675,000 (6.5 deaths/1,000)

Mexico: 300,000 (21 deaths/1,000)
Indonesia: 1.5 million (30 deaths/1,000)
South Africa: 300,000 (44 deaths/1,000)
Three Waves in the United States

March - April 1918

September - October 1918
(200,000 deaths in October alone)

December 1918 – March 1919
BRITISH, REINFORCED, BEAT GERMANS BACK; BERLIN ADMITS PROGRESS IS NOW SLOW; LLOYD GEORGE CALLS FOR AMERICA'S AID

BRITISH REPULSE ALL-DAY ATTACKS AT ARRAS; FRENCH RETAKE GROUND ON GERMAN FLANK; FOCH LIKELY TO COMMAND ALLIED ARMIES

GERMANS PUSH ON IN SOUTH, CHECKED ON NORTHERN FRONT; PERONNE TAKEN, BUT GIGANTIC BATTLE RAGES AT BAPAUME; BERLIN REPORTS AMERICANS ENGAGED; TELLS OF SHELLING PARIS

HAIG, ADMITS RETIREMENT AND HEAVY LOSS OF MATERIAL; FRENCH, TOO, FALL BACK, INFlicting HEAVY LOSS ON THE POE

HAIG FALLS UNDER ASSAULT OF FRESH GERMAN TROOPS; HAIG RETIRING AND HEAVY LOSS OF MATERIAL; FRENCH, TOO, FALL BACK, INFlicting HEAVY LOSS ON THE POE

NEW YORK TIMES
All the city was dying...
The Flu in Baltimore

Sep. 24: Several cases reported at Fort Meade
Within days, 1,900 ill

Sep. 26: 300 cases reported at Fort McHenry
1,150 cases at Aberdeen Proving Grounds
First 10 civilian cases
Health Commissioner Blake: “same old influenza”

Oct. 5: 117 deaths in previous week
Oct. 7: School board closes public schools
Oct. 9: Blake bans public gatherings
Oct. 10: New infections reach 1,962 in a single day
Oct. 12: 563 deaths in previous week
Oct. 16: 200+ deaths in a single day
Oct. 31: More than 3,000 deaths in previous month

Nov. 4: Schools reopen

Dec. Third wave

By the end of 1918: 60,000 cases (est.) and 4,125 deaths
Flu Mortality by Age

Source: Morens et. al, 2010
Mortality Patterns

Wide variation in mortality across states

Wisconsin: 360/100,000
Pennsylvania: 757/100,000
Colorado: 681/100,000
Kansas: 423/100,000

Higher morbidity and mortality in urban areas

Wide variation in mortality across cities

St. Louis, MO: 386/100,000
Kansas City, MO: 624/100,000
Baltimore: 559/100,000
Philadelphia: 748/100,000
Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases

As Dangerous as Poison Gas Shells

Spread of Spanish Influenza Menaces Our War Production

U.S. Public Health Service Begins National-wide Health Campaign.

Spanish Influenza
has endangered the prosecution of the WAR in Europe.
There are 1500 cases in the Navy Yard
30 deaths have already resulted
spitting spreads Spanish Influenza DONT SPIT

Spit Spreads Death

Women wearing masks stand together.
TR in Baltimore During Liberty Loan Drive, 1918

September 1918
Producer unknown
Citizens---
A Crisis Is Here!

THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC has interfered with all group meetings

—OF THE—

Fourth Liberty Loan

The Government calls upon YOU not to forget YOUR duty to the FIGHTERS IN FRANCE.

Subscribe at any Bank, Trust Company and show your patriotism by doing it TODAY!

CITY LIBERTY BOND COMMITTEE
Headquarters 45 North George Street. York, Pa.
Long(er)-Term Effects

Demand shock
Labor supply shock
Mild recession August 1918 – March 1919
Depression 1920 – 1921
Physical/mental problems for children in utero
Emotional Shock

“Why do narratives affect economics? Because when we want to understand a depression or recession, for instance, we have to understand why some people will stop spending. Recessions happen when people stop buying things: they don’t buy a new car; they don’t buy a new house. So why not? They might say they stopped spending because recession struck, but that doesn’t tell me why the recession started.”

“There was a background then of horrible recent events: World War I, which ended only 14 months before the start of the depression, an influenza epidemic even more deadly than the war that started during the war and was not quite over, and a series of postwar race riots in the United States... hugely unsettling narratives that could have led to a sense of economic uncertainty that might have discouraged discretionary spending of households and slowed down hiring decisions of firms around the world.”

-Robert Shiller
“Destroyer and Teacher”

Development of county health boards
Hospital construction and upgrades
Validation of “germ theory”
- and a boon for advertisers
Informing responses to present-day epidemics