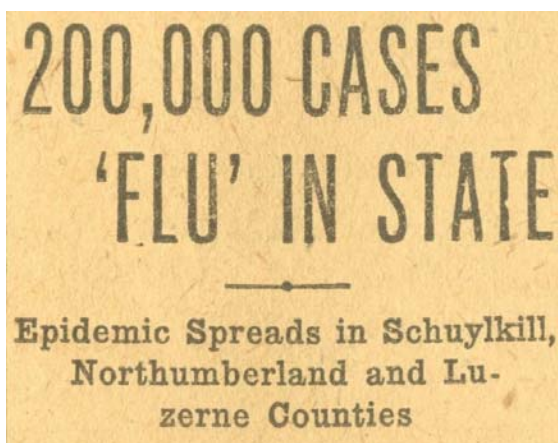


Reporting on the Spanish Influenza, 1918

Introduction



The [Spanish Influenza](#) (H1N1) first appeared in the United States in March 1918.¹ There were periodic, minor outbreaks for six months, but in September a highly fatal second wave of influenza broke out across the country and lasted through January 1919. Within days of being exposed, patients became gravely ill and many died. Influenza is usually dangerous for the very young and the elderly. During this outbreak the disease was deadly for people aged twenty to forty as well. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 195,000 Americans died in October 1918 alone. In less than two years, an estimated 25 million people in the United States (25% of the total

population of 103 million people) became ill and 675,000 died.²

Pennsylvania lost 60,000 people, more than any other state. Pittsburgh, Scranton, and Philadelphia were the most affected cities in the US. With no vaccines, the only way to combat the virus was to establish quarantines, encourage the use of disinfectants, promote good personal hygiene, and limit public gatherings. In the days before the internet, television, and even radio, notice of these precautions was disseminated primarily through newspapers. The articles below from the *York Dispatch* published between October 4 and October 8, 1918, show the impact of the Spanish Influenza in York, Pennsylvania, as officials took steps to halt the spread of the virus. The articles also reported on the devastating effects it was having on their community.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the Friday, October 4, 1918, news article, the author reports that “Acting State Commissioner of Health B. F. Hoyer has ordered every place of amusement and every saloon in the state closed as a measure of warfare against the further spread of influenza.” Is this a reasonable and/or practical measure? Why or Why not? Explain.
2. He continues “Not in the history of previous epidemics has it been necessary to take such drastic action.” Is the author overstating the danger with the influenza outbreak? What is the purpose of reporting in such apocalyptic language and is it effective?
3. In this same passage the author writes that “the simultaneous appearance in many army and navy camps has started the speculation as to the possibility of the introduction of germs by our enemies.” Is this type of language a reflection of paranoia, xenophobia, or responsible journalism? Explain.

¹ <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-now/essays/influenza-pandemic-1918%E2%80%931919>

² By comparison, 49 million people (15% of the US population of 327 million) were stricken with the flu in 2017–2018 resulting in 80,000 deaths.

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4. Using what you remember about outbreaks of disease in the past (e.g., the Black Plague, etc.) was this influenza outbreak a greater threat to the public than were outbreaks of disease in the past? Explain.
5. How could keeping yourself healthy be seen as a form of patriotism?
6. Why, in your opinion, did the government feel that it was necessary to allow local authorities to determine if churches stayed open or not? (*Associated Press – Influenza Order Makes Philadelphia 'Bone Dry'*)
7. On October 7th, the Associated Press reported that saloons and moving picture places in Allentown were open. If this was true, why might the town ignore a state-mandated closing order?

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Image

<p style="text-align: center;">FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1918.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WAR ON INFLUENZA</p> <p>Acting State Commissioner of Health B. F. Royer has ordered every place of amusement and every saloon in the state closed as a measure of warfare against the further spread of influenza. This edict goes into effect at once. The scourge is spreading at an alarming rate. Not in the history of previous epidemics has it been necessary to take such drastic action.</p> <p>The rapid spread over the greater part of the country of the serious epidemic has mysterious features. It is the kind of thing that usually is looked for in winter. The nearly simultaneous appearance in many army and navy camps has started speculation as to the possibility of the introduction of germs by our enemies, a suggestion that the secret service is no doubt considering.</p> <p>There are times when entrance to the army camps should be more strictly guarded, and the closest scrutiny should be given to the movements of all persons giving suspicion of disloyalty and malice.</p> <p>Outdoor air and sunlight help avert</p>	<p>alty and malice.</p> <p>Outdoor air and sunlight help avert this or any other disease. In tightly closed workshops, stores, and railroad trains, it is no wonder that people become so enfeebled by bad air and that the germs become so contagious. It is a common sight to see hundreds of persons attending a meeting in a room where you can see no sign of any ventilation except the opening of a door when some one goes out.</p> <p>If anyone feeling the oppressiveness of the atmosphere attempts to open a window the black looks he gets from his neighbors lead him to desist.</p> <p>Employers in localities where grip prevails find the disease is a big handicap to their production. If this thing goes much farther, it will hold up war work. People who have charge of workshops will do well to see that they are well supplied with fresh air. Work people should wear warm clothes so they can stand a few drafts. The girls with the mosquito netting waists should substitute something more appropriate to fall weather. A little effort to keep ourselves in good physical condition will save many serious and some fatal illnesses, and help keep the industrial machinery of the country running.</p>
<p>York Dispatch, York, PA, October 4, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09891.01)</p>	

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<p>ern munitions making centers.</p> <h3>INFLUENZA ORDER MAKES PHILADELPHIA 'BONE DRY'</h3> <p>By Associated Press.</p> <p>Philadelphia, Oct. 4.—Influenza is on the increase in Philadelphia, 738 new cases having been reported in the last 24 hours. As a result of the epidemic, Philadelphia will, after 7 o'clock tonight, be "bone dry" for the first time in its history. Saloons, cafes, wholesalers and manufacturers, under a police order, were given until that hour to close out the stock on hand and put up their shutters. The closing is for an indefinite period and is in compliance with an order issued by the state health authorities. The order also applies to places of amusement, but leaves it to the judgment of the local authorities whether churches and Sunday schools shall close.</p> <p>All the courts in Philadelphia adjourned today until Oct. 21 and the grand jury was dismissed. The big football game scheduled for tomorrow between University of Pennsylvania and the United States marines was called off.</p> <p>All trolley cars today displayed cards with this warning:</p> <p>"Sneeze, cough or expectorate, if you must, in your handkerchief. You are in no danger if every one heeds this warning. This car is disinfected, ventilators must be kept open.</p> <p>"Board of Health."</p> <p>All Liberty loan meetings have been called off.</p> <p>Dr. Wilmer Krusen, director of public health, says Spanish influenza is incorrect as a name for the prevailing disease. It should be called epidemic influenza, he says.</p> <p>The state department of health has closed 120 tuberculosis dispensaries throughout the state, releasing doctors and nurses for epidemic work. Garrisons of the army storehouses in Pennsylvania were ordered to go into tents and the barrack buildings will be used as hospitals.</p>	<h3>COTS AND TENTS FOR SICK COAL MINERS</h3> <p>By Associated Press.</p> <p>Harrisburg, Oct. 4.—Adjutant General Beary today sent 25 cots and equipment with hospital tents and cooking utensils to the McIntyre region of Indiana county, where miners are ill with influenza. The men in charge of the equipment were sent by truck with orders to help health authorities. This was the first action taken by the military department and it was at the request of Dr. Royer.</p> <p>General Beary also directed that the Chester armory of the reserve militia be turned over to health authorities for hospital use if necessary. Drills of all militia organizations and home defense units will be dispensed with generally throughout the state for the next week or so it was learned today.</p> <h3>INFLUENZA WILL RETARD U. S. TROOP SHIPMENTS</h3> <p>By Associated Press.</p> <p>Washington, Oct. 4.—American troops abroad now number 1,800,000, members of the house military committee were informed today at their weekly conference at the war department. Spanish influenza in camps and cantonments will retard shipments somewhat in the immediate future, they were told, the department having adopted the policy of not sending men overseas who have been exposed or show symptoms of the disease.</p> <h3>W. C. T. U. CELEBRATION WAS SHORT LIVED</h3> <p>By Associated Press.</p> <p>Reading, Pa., Oct. 4.—When word reached the state W. C. T. U. convention, in session here today, that all saloons had to close, because of Spanish influenza, the delegates rejoiced. The delegation was short lived, however, as peremptory orders to close the convention, which was to have continued until next Tuesday, came a few minutes later. The delegates are leaving. William J. Bryan was scheduled to attend on Sunday.</p>
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York Dispatch, York, PA, October 4, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09891.01)

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400 DEATHS IN PHILA. IN LAST 48 HOURS

By Associated Press.

Philadelphia, Oct. 7.—Influenza continued to spread rapidly throughout Philadelphia and its environs today. During the 48 hours ending at noon, 5,561 new cases were reported to the board of health. In the same period there were more than 400 deaths from influenza and pneumonia. It is estimated by city authorities that there have been 175,000 cases since the epidemic began. A serious feature of the epidemic is the lack of nurses. Those in regular and emergency hospitals are overworked. Instances are reported of nurses who have worked for 36 hours continuously with scarcely an hour's rest. Across the Delaware river, in Southern New Jersey, the situation is reported to be grave. Dr. Davis president of the Camden board of health, estimates that there are 5,000 individual cases in that city. He declares the epidemic has not yet reached its height. Emergency hospitals are being established and the leading women of the city have gone into them and are doing even the menial work in addition to nursing the sick. Frank J. Connell, his wife and their 10-year-old daughter all died today in the Connell home within a period of five hours.

In Gloucester, near Camden, 400 new cases developed since yesterday. Medical assistance has arrived there from Washington.

STATE CLOSING ORDER FOR INDEFINITE PERIOD

By Associated Press.

Harrisburg, Oct. 7.—There is no intention of recalling the anti-congregating saloon closing order. We are enforcing it everywhere as time goes on it may be restricted," if necessary said Dr. B. F. Royer, acting commissioner of health, today, when asked about reports that the order might be rescinded.

"I cannot say when the ban will be lifted. The reports that it was to be changed probably grew out of the arrangements we are making for sale of stimulants on prescriptions of medical men."

Details of organization of the 17 nursing districts into which the state has been divided were worked out by Commissioner Royer and bureau chiefs at a conference today. They will be in charge of nurses who have just returned from Massachusetts and the work of organization in communities will be handled by the nurses from the dispensaries of the department of health and other experienced nurses from various sections of the state.

While today's reports showed an increase in cases in eastern counties not many have appeared beyond Jefferson, Indiana, and Somerset counties. The Schuylkill county situation is serious and requests have been made to state hospitals for details of physicians and nurses. Many nurses are needed in that county.

Following an offer of people of West Chester of the country club at that place for an emergency hospital, Dr. Royer said that country club houses near populous centers could be used and that he hoped West Chester's example would be followed.

Emergency hospitals have been opened in Marcus Hook, Chester, Pottsville, Scranton, Norristown, Bethlehem, Stroudsburg, Williamstown, Shamokin, Steelton, Wishaw, West Chester and McIntyre with two in Minersville.

Adjutant General Beary today wired commanding officers of units of the reserve militia to call off all drills this week.

Dr. Royer today asked the state police department to make reports to him on the manner in which the closing order was observed in Allentown, it being reported here that saloons and moving picture places were open on Saturday.

York Dispatch, York, PA, October 7, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09891.02)

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DISEASE AGAIN ON INCREASE IN PHILA.

Philadelphia, Oct. 9.—Influenza is again on the increase in this city. For the 24 hours ending at noon today 4,013 new cases were reported. In the same period there were 304 deaths from influenza and 124 from pneumonia.

State health authorities are making preparations to meet the epidemic in the western section of the state, which thus far has been comparatively free of the malady.

3,700 INFLUENZA CASES REPORTED IN OHIO

By Associated Press.

Columbus, Ohio, Oct. 9.—Additional Spanish influenza cases to the number of 3,700 were unofficially reported to the state department of health today, making a total of approximately 28,700 cases that have been reported since the outbreak of the epidemic in Ohio.

Fifty-four additional deaths last night and today were reported from Camp Sherman, where the death total now has reached approximately 700.

Military authorities today renewed their appeal for nurses.

EPIDEMIC AFFECTING OUTPUT OF ANTHRACITE

By Associated Press.

Reading, Pa., Oct. 9.—It was learned from official sources today that the spread of influenza in the Schuylkill coal regions is now affecting the output of anthracite to the extent of nearly 12,000 tons daily.

75 DEATHS AT CAMP MEADE IN 24 HOURS

By Associated Press.

Baltimore, Oct. 9.—Seventy-five men died, 166 were stricken with influenza, and 289 new cases of pneumonia developed at Camp Meade during the last 24 hours, it was announced today.

In this city 56 deaths due to influenza and 1,525 new cases were recorded in the last 24 hours.

All schools, public and private, and all places of amusement have been closed.

PHYSICIANS SUCCUMB IN SCHUYLKILL REGION

By Associated Press.

Pottsville, Pa., Oct. 9.—There has been a decrease of new cases of influenza throughout the Schuylkill region, but added alarm is felt because a large portion of the physicians are succumbing to the disease.

Physicians are being dispatched here from Chicago to help in handling the situation. The hospital units sent to Minersville found many of the foreign population lying ill in bed alongside of corpses as the number of cases did not permit proper care for either the living or the dead. At the small mining town of Maryd, 200 cases are reported and a large percentage are developing into pneumonia. Motor delivery trucks are being pressed into service as ambulances throughout the country.

Dr. Frank Marshall, a leading physician, succumbed to the disease during the night.

York Dispatch, York, PA, October 9, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09891.04)

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PREPARING FOR INFLUENZA IN WESTERN PENNA.

By Associated Press.

Harrisburg, Oct. 9.—Adjutant General Beary today sent a hospital unit to Tower City to assist in caring for influenza sufferers in that anthracite mining town and shipped 40 cots to Glen Lyon, Luzerne county. Tents have also been sent to Ernest, an Indiana county mining town, while large shipments are being sent to Pittsburgh in preparation for an outbreak. General C. B. Dougherty notified General Beary today that the Wilkes-Barre armory would be opened to care for influenza sufferers in that section. The Easton, Lebanon and Reading armories have been turned into hospitals.

Schuylkill and Jefferson county conditions were reported as still serious today.

Western Pennsylvania messages today indicated general preparations under way to meet the epidemic in the Pittsburgh, New Castle, Washington, Greensburg and Mercer districts.

INFLUENZA HALTS THREE WHITE PLAGUE MEETINGS

By Associated Press.

New York, Oct. 9.—On account of the spread of Spanish influenza the National Tuberculosis association announced today it had deferred indefinitely three sectional conferences. They are the Southern, at Birmingham, Ala., Oct. 11 and 12; the North Atlantic, at Pittsburgh, Oct. 17 and 18, and the New England, at Providence, Oct. 25 and 26.

17 DEATHS IN RAHWAY, N. J.

By Associated Press.

Rahway, N. J., Oct. 9.—One-fifth of Rahway's population of 10,000 is suffering from Spanish influenza. There have been 17 deaths this week. All schools, theaters, saloons and ice cream stores were closed today and church services and public gatherings of all kinds have been suspended.

DIG WIVES' GRAVES

INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC AT WILMINGTON, DEL., OVERTAXES THE UNDERTAKERS

Wilmington, Del., Oct. 9.—Although physicians stated yesterday that the number of cases of influenza appeared to be on the decrease, the deaths have increased considerably during the last two days. As a result it is impossible to bury all the victims and vaults in local cemeteries are fast being filled. In two instances men whose wives had died have been compelled to dig graves in cemeteries for them.

The reports of the health department yesterday showed 77 deaths since Friday noon, but these figures did not include those who had died yesterday or today. With these deaths the total so far has reached 174 and it is expected that yesterday and today will reach considerably more than 200.

William H. Taylor, a saloonkeeper, and an automobile chauffeur named Cox were the two who were compelled to dig graves for their wives. In several cases relatives of the dead have assisted in similar work with the grave-diggers.

Owing to the outbreak Judge Churchman, in court, announced that hereafter no one out witnesses in cases to be tried would be admitted to the sessions and only those cases where bail could not be produced would be tried at this time.

York Dispatch, York, PA, October 9, 1918. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09891.04)