

# OHIO AND LIMA/ALLEN COUNTY DEAL WITH THE 1918 PANDEMIC



Although people dutifully wore masks, these provided only a very limited protection against the influenza virus. [Credit: Office of the Public Health Service Historian]

In Ohio, the pandemic peaked during the fall of 1918. It gradually declined during the winter and spring. By the summer of 1919, it had disappeared from the state. Cities and rural communities across the state experienced high rates of influenza as well as significant numbers of deaths from influenza or pneumonia.

Newspaper articles from the fall of 1918 give some insight into how the pandemic was handled locally. On September 24, the Lima Health Board received a directive from the State Department of Health that required local Health Boards to notify the State of any local cases of Spanish influenza; no cases had been reported yet in Ohio.

On October 10, a public meeting was held at the city hall that included physicians, members of the Board of Education and others. It was the unanimous feeling of those present that “nothing too drastic” could be carried out to prevent Lima from suffering as other cities had. The decision was made to “close Lima up tight” and not wait until the city started to undergo an epidemic. All schools—public, private and parochial—churches, theatres, motion picture shows, lodges, dance halls, billiard rooms, pool parlors and saloons were closed. Special sales in retail stores designed to attract crowds were banned and only private funerals were allowed.

By mid-November, the strategy seemed to be helping, when deaths from the flu in Lima were compared with nearby cities:

	Population	Deaths
Ashland, O.	8,000	87
Findlay, O.	20,000	85
Dayton, O.	180,000	405
Lima, O.	45,000	26

More cases of the flu continued through the winter with a variety of measures coming and going, all designed to limit the spread of disease, for example requiring masks in public, and fumigating street cars. When the bans were lifted, an article in the Times-Democrat stated that “It has been pretty blue times for Lima with all of these institutions at a standstill. It has injured business immeasurably, and yet all of that is forgotten when we consider that had it not been done, more sorrow might have come into our hearts than we have ever known.”

## LIFE IN 1918

- ◆ Despite the fact that the world was at war, Americans in 1918 had more money and leisure time than any previous generation. People attended movies, amusement parks, dance halls, skating rinks, pool halls and saloons.
- ◆ Life expectancy for men was only 53 years; life expectancy for women was only slightly better at 54.
- ◆ In the nineteenth century, most physicians and public health experts believed that disease was caused not by microorganisms but by dirt itself.
- ◆ The Public Health Service (PHS) had legislative authority “to investigate the diseases of man and [the] conditions influencing the propagation and spread” of these diseases.
- ◆ Because few diseases could be cured, the prevention of disease was central to the PHS mission.



Information for this insert was gathered from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Lima Times-Democrat, and the Lima Republican Gazette. Photos/Images courtesy of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the National Library of Medicine and the Minnesota Department of Health.

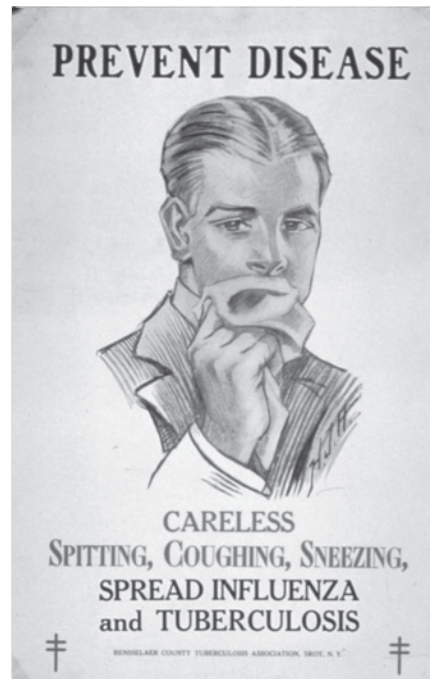
# PUBLIC HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS, THEN AND NOW

1918

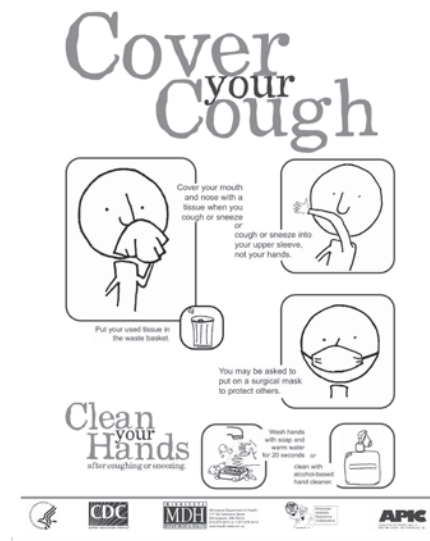
Rules from the surgeon general of the army to observe in avoiding the disease.

How to strengthen our arsenal defense against Spanish influenza

1. Avoid needless crowding – influenza is a crowd disease.
2. Smother your coughs and sneezes – others do not want the germs which you would throw away.
3. Your nose, not your mouth was made to breathe through – get the habit.
4. Remember the three “C’s” – a clean mouth, clean skin and clean clothes.
5. Try to keep cool when you walk, and warm when you ride and sleep.
6. Open the windows – always at home at night; and at the office when practicable.
7. Food will win the war if you give it a chance – help by choosing and chewing your food well.
8. Your fate may be in your own hands – wash your hands before eating.
9. Don’t let the waste product of digestion accumulate – drink a glass or two of water on getting up.
10. Don’t use a napkin, towel, spoon, fork, glass, or cup which has been used by another person and not washed.
11. Avoid tight clothes, tight shoes, tight gloves – seek to make nature your ally, not your prisoner.
12. When the air is pure, breathe all of it you can – breathe deeply.



Stop the spread of germs that make you and others sick!



2008

Recommendations from the Ohio Department of Health

What you can do about a potential influenza pandemic

1. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away after you use it.
2. Cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue.
3. Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs often spread this way.
4. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze or use the restroom and before eating. If you are not near soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
5. Stay away as much as you can from people who are sick.
6. If you get sick, stay home from work or school.

Preventive measures and good health habits can help keep your body healthy and fight off the flu.

1. Eat a balanced diet that includes plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grain products.
2. Drink plenty of water and go easy on salt, sugar, alcohol and saturated fat.
3. Exercise on a regular basis. Thirty minutes or more of physical activity most days of the week can help boost your immunity.
4. Get plenty of rest. Sleep is shown to help your body's ability to fight off illness.