

Flu pandemic timeline

New influenza strains are rare, and pandemics are even rarer. If the 2009 Mexican flu virus disappears entirely, this year's neoantigen flu likely will be considered a pandemic scare. But if it returns and causes illness and deaths later this year and next winter, it will join the three other influenza pandemics of the past century.

They are as follows:

- **1918 Spanish flu:** An estimated 20 to 40% of the worldwide population became ill, and 20 to 40 million people died across the globe. There were more than 500,000 deaths in the United States. The flu had the worst impact on people between the ages of 20 and 50, often killing them within hours of their first symptoms.
- **1957 Asian flu:** First identified in Asia, this pandemic virus was quickly identified and vaccine was available by August, 1957. There were small outbreaks in the U.S. during the summer, and the disease spread quickly that fall. School children had the highest infection rate, and about 69,800 people, mainly the elderly, in the U.S. died from it.
- **1968 Hong Kong flu:** The pandemic began in Hong Kong early in 1968 and spread to the United States by September. The virus impacted the elderly the most, and deaths peaked in December, 1968, and January, 1969. It was the 20th century's mildest pandemic with around 33,800 deaths.

There were three flu scares that were highly localized and did not result in a spike in morbidity and mortality. These were the 1976 swine flu scare at Fort Dix, the 1977 Russian flu that caused illness primarily in children, and the 1997 avian flu scare that caused a handful of deaths before China slaughtered 1.5 million chickens and ended the spread of the virus.