



Spanish Flu

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Why in News

As COVID-19 declared a global health crisis, parallels are being drawn with the Spanish influenza of 1918-19, which is considered the most devastating pandemic in recent history.

Key Points

- Spanish flu was caused by an **H1N1 influenza virus**.
- There is **no universal consensus** regarding where the virus originated. It is believed that **World War I** was partly responsible for its spread.
- **Spain was one of the earliest countries** where the epidemic was identified, but historians believe this was likely a result of wartime censorship.
- Spain was a neutral nation during the war and did not enforce strict censorship of its press, which freely published early accounts of the illness. As a result, people falsely believed the illness was specific to Spain, and the name "**Spanish flu**" stuck.

How was the Outbreak Tamed

- **Awareness:** That word got around about this killer disease through government efforts and through informal communications.
Social Distance: People were practising social distancing and taking other preventive steps.
- **Natural Phenomenon:** The virus evolved to become milder in the process.
There is a theory that, **as viruses propagate, the more virulent strains are unable to survive, reproduce, and propagate** as effectively as the less virulent strains, because their hosts die before the virus can jump to new susceptible hosts.
- **Climatic Conditions:** Differences in climate across India.
Influenza viruses tend to not do as well in warm and moist conditions as they do in cooler, drier conditions.

Learning from the Spanish flu

- **Quick Response:** A quick initial emergency response to deal with pandemic COVID-19. Locations close to an entry point will have extremely short windows of time to deal with a virulent pathogen.
While locations that are distant from the entry point will have longer windows of time to prepare for and deal with less-lethal variants of the disease.
- **Hygiene:** To be extra vigilant about hygiene and aggressively practice social distancing.

H1N1 Virus

- H1N1 influenza virus causes **Swine Flu**.
- Swine Flu is an **infection** of the **respiratory tract** characterized by the usual symptoms of flu — cough, nasal secretions, fever, loss of appetite, fatigue, and headache.
- It is called swine flu because it was known in the past to occur in people who had been in the **vicinity of pigs**.
- The virus is transmitted by short-distance airborne transmission, particularly in crowded enclosed spaces. Hand contamination and direct contact are other possible sources of transmission.

Source:IE