



# Flu: The Story Of The Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus that Caused It

By Gina Kolata

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A national bestseller, the fast-paced and gripping account of the Great Flu Epidemic of 1918 from acclaimed science journalist Gina Kolata, now featuring a new epilogue about avian flu.

When we think of plagues, we think of AIDS, Ebola, anthrax spores, and, of course, the Black Death. But in 1918 the Great Flu Epidemic killed an estimated forty million people virtually overnight. If such a plague returned today, taking a comparable percentage of the US population with it, 1.5 million Americans would die.

In *Flu*, Gina Kolata, an acclaimed reporter for *The New York Times*, unravels the mystery of this lethal virus with the high drama of a great adventure story. From Alaska to Norway, from the streets of Hong Kong to the corridors of the White House, Kolata tracks the race to recover the live pathogen and probes the fear that has impelled government policy.

A gripping work of science writing, *Flu* addresses the prospects for a great epidemic's recurrence and considers what can be done to prevent it.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Feeling tired, achy, and congested? You'll hope not after reading science writer Gina Kolata's engrossing *Flu*, a fascinating look at the 1918 epidemic that wiped out around 40 million people in less than a year and afflicted more than one of every four Americans. This tragedy, just on the heels of World War I and far more deadly, so traumatized the survivors that few would talk about it afterward. Kolata reports on the scientific investigation of this bizarre outbreak, in particular the attempts to sequence the virus' DNA from tissue samples of victims. She also looks at the social and personal effects of the disease, from improved public health awareness to the loss of productivity. (The disease affected 20- to 40-year-olds disproportionately.)

How could this disease, now almost trivial to healthy young people, have become so virulent? The answer is complex, invoking epidemiology, immunology, and even psychology, but Kolata cuts a swath through medical papers and statistical reports to tell a story of an out-of-control virus exploiting an exhausted world on the brink of transition into modern society. Through letters, interviews, and news reports, she pieces together a cautionary tale that captures the horror of a devastating illness. Research marches onward, but we're still at the mercy of something as simple as the flu. --*Rob Lightner*

#### From Publishers Weekly

"It was a plague so deadly that if a similar virus were to strike today, it would kill more people in a single year than heart disease, cancers, strokes, chronic pulmonary disease, AIDS and Alzheimer's disease combined." Between 20 million and 100 million people worldwide died in the 1918 flu pandemic, but for years afterward this deadliest plague in history was almost completely forgotten. Histories and even medical texts rarely mentioned it. This disconnect between the flu's devastation and its obscurity is the starting point for Kolata's incisive history. She explains how the plague spread, covers the various speculations about its causes and origins and gives an account of the search to retrieve a specimen of the virus strain once genetic science had advanced enough to unravel the virus's mysteries. Tissue samples from an obese woman buried in the permafrost of Alaska and from two soldiers who died in army camps preserved by the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in thumb-sized bits of paraffin prove to be the last remaining sources of the 1918 strain. Kolata, a science writer for the New York Times and author of *Clone*, profiles the scientists who tracked down these samples, follows their investigations and explains their conclusions. Could such a deadly flu appear again? Many scientists fear it could, hence their quick response to the 1997 outbreak of chicken flu in Hong Kong, which led to the slaughter of 1.2 million birds and, Kolata argues, averted another worldwide disaster. Clearly explaining both the science and the social toll of the pandemic, Kolata writes an admirable history and soberly spells out how the U.S. government is prepared or unprepared for a similar public health threat today. (Nov.)

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#### From Library Journal

The science reporter for the New York Times examines one of the worst epidemics in history.

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