



The Great Pandemic

THE UNITED STATES IN 1918–1919

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NEVADA

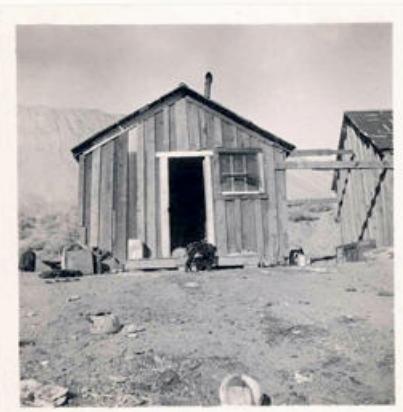
Nevada was slow to report the presence of influenza. This was not surprising. Many states, especially rural ones had difficulties assembling staff and getting them to report diseases even before the 1918–1919 pandemic. Nevada, which was the smallest state in the Union in terms of its population, had never been consistent in reporting to the Public Health Service.

On October 15th, public health officials sent their first report to the PHS admitting that there were at least 38 cases of influenza in the state. Eleven days later, state officials reported new cases while noting that deaths from influenza were occurring across the state. By late November, Nevada had ceased to report to the Public Health Service. The disease had not yet disappeared from the state, however.

The response of officials and communities varied. In Elko County, school teacher Eleanor Holland found herself in a region where everyone was made to wear a face mask in the hope that the disease would be contained. Originally, Holland found the idea of wearing a mask ludicrous but she quickly changed her mind, noting "it didn't seem so funny when I came down with the flu and nearly died. Fortunately, none of the other teachers got it though they all helped take care of me." The masks of the early 20th century did little to prevent the spread of influenza.

Some state officials wanted to establish quarantine stations at the state's borders to prevent the disease from spreading further into Nevada. As in other states and localities, there were bans on public gatherings in an attempt to prevent the disease from spreading. In White Pine County, for example, a county-wide quarantine was imposed on October 12th and this was in effect until December 28th.

The disease slowly declined in the state during the late fall, resurging in the winter and gradually disappearing in the summer of 1919.



The Bureau of Indian Affairs found themselves overwhelmed as influenza swept through the state's reservations. Influenza swept through rural reservations, killing thousands in its wake. [Credit: The Library of Congress]

Population in 1920:
77,000

Demographics:
Most of the state's residents lived in rural areas. The state had no cities with a population above 70,000.

First Official Report of Influenza:
The Public Health Service did not require states to report influenza before September 27th. Nevada first reported the presence of influenza on October 15th but the disease was undoubtedly present in the state much earlier.