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### **State Report Analyzes Flu Data from 1918 Influenza Pandemic; Commemoration Activities Include Emergency Preparedness Activities**

ANCHORAGE – The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Section of Health Analytics and Vital Records released a report today on persons who died during the 1918 and 1919 influenza pandemic in Alaska. This report, done to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pandemic, also known as the Spanish flu, is the first complete analysis of Alaska death certificates for pandemic flu data.

The first wave of the pandemic skipped Alaska, but the second wave devastated Alaskans after infected steamship passengers arrived in Nome on Oct. 20, 1918. From Nome, the virus spread rapidly across the Seward Peninsula and then throughout Alaska, killing large numbers of people and in some cases wiping out entire villages. According to the new DHSS report, over 80 percent of all pandemic deaths were Alaska Native people.

The death toll worldwide was estimated to be 50 million people, with about 675,000 of those deaths in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“It’s hard now to imagine the magnitude of the suffering caused by the pandemic flu to Alaskans in 1918 and 1919,” said Dr. Jay Butler, Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. “This analysis pays tribute to this incredibly difficult time in Alaska’s history and reminds us that we need to be prepared for the next pandemic when it comes.”

This DHSS analysis also predicts, based on 2016 population data, how many people would die in Alaska if a similar pandemic were to occur today. If we had a flu season with the same rate of death as the epidemic wave in late the fall of 1918, the estimated number of deaths would be 11,970 Alaskans.

When the 1918 pandemic occurred, the flu vaccine had not yet been invented, there were not antiviral drugs or antibiotics, and life-support technology did not exist. Today, public health employees work to identify new types of pandemic influenza as early as possible. This is important to develop effective vaccines.

Throughout Alaska this fall, the Section of Public Health Nursing is working with communities to set up exercises for emergency responders to practice distributing medical countermeasures, such as vaccine and antivirals, in response to a public health emergency. For example, Public Health Nurses are coordinating with local emergency preparedness officials and other partners in Valdez (Oct. 6), Craig on Prince of Wales Island (Oct. 13) and Ketchikan (Oct. 20) to provide state-supplied seasonal influenza vaccinations at no cost to those participating in the exercise. These exercises test local response capacity and provide a way for Alaskans to protect themselves against influenza in the coming winter.

Here are some specific results from the “1918 Pandemic Influenza Mortality in Alaska” report:

- In 1918 and 1919, 1,113 people died from influenza. The state’s pre-pandemic population size was about 58,000 in 1917.
- In Alaska, the highest number of influenza-related deaths occurred in November 1918, with 831 deaths in that month alone. The next peak occurred in May and June 1919, when 108 deaths occurred.
- Influenza-related deaths from 1918 to 1919 comprised of a higher proportion of females (55 percent) than males (44 percent).
- The age group hit hardest was persons 30 to 44 years of age (30 percent), followed by children up to 14 years old (24 percent).
- During the 1918-1919 Influenza pandemic, nearly two-thirds of influenza-related deaths occurred in the Nome census area.

[Read the full report here.](#)

**For more information**

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Pandemic Influenza](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Past Pandemics](#)

[DHSS Influenza Information](#)

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