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The Epidemic of Influenza in Connecticut

The beginning of the influenza epidemic in Connecticut occurred in New London, in the eastern part of the state, about September 1, 1918, when several cases were reported by the naval hospital located there. These cases originated at the Experimental Station and Fort Trumbull where vessels from foreign ports had discharged patients. Within a day or two several cases were brought to the hospital from the submarine base located two miles above New London. During the first ten days of September about one hundred cases were sent to the New London naval hospital.

On September 9, three cases were reported among the civilian population adjoining Fort Trumbull, all of which were among employees in the Fort. From September 12 onward many cases were reported, especially from the government station on the State Pier, where three hundred men from the Boston Navy Yard had arrived September 10. Nearly seven thousand of the naval men in the New London district were billeted in civilian homes, and the disease became generally prevalent among the civilians before the end of the month. The total number of civilian cases reported in New London for September was 901; for October, 936. No reports or statistics were furnished by the naval department after the first few cases.

Although the disease appears to have been primarily introduced into Connecticut by ships arriving at New London from

abroad and by men coming there from the Boston Navy Yard, numerous foci developed in various parts of the state about the middle of September, the source of which was traced to other military establishments, principally Camp Devens, Mass. The towns of Wallingford, Windham, Hartland, Rockville and Danbury were among the earliest affected, and in each of them a definite history was obtained showing the development of the disease within two or three days following visits of soldiers from Camp Devens.

The wave of the infection in Connecticut was from east to west, reaching its peak in the eastern section about October 4, in the central area October 15, and in the western district about October 24. These dates are based on the morbidity and mortality reports from the various counties. The towns early infected by visitors from military establishments passed the climax sooner than surrounding towns.

Influenza was made a reportable disease in New London County on September 12, and for the entire state on September 18, 1918, and active measures were adopted immediately by the State Department of Health to warn the public, through the press and by posters, of the serious nature of the spreading epidemic.

The policy of keeping schools and theatres open under certain restrictions was advocated. Not all cities continued to observe this policy, but in those which did, namely, Bridgeport, Hartford and New Haven, the course of the epidemic was less explosive and more extended, thus permitting more individual medical attention and resulting in a lower mortality rate. The following table shows the death rates of Bridgeport, New Haven and Hartford in comparison with those of the cities most severely affected. It covers the period from September 1 to December 23, and shows the number of deaths per thousand population:

Bridgeport.	5.7	Seymour,	11.4
New Haven.	6.0	Willimantic,	10.7
Hartford.	7.0	Naugatuck.	9.2
		Waterbury,	8.8
		Meriden,	8.4
		New Britain,	7.9

During the epidemic 101 nurses and 48 physicians, secured from outside sources, were sent to the neediest parts of the state. Thirty-five emergency hospitals were either established, supervised or assisted by the State Department of Health.

About four thousand doses of influenza vaccine were administered, mostly in institutions and factories, but a lack of reports made it impossible to form any definite conclusions regarding the efficacy of this form of treatment.

The accompanying charts and table cover the period from September 1 to December 28, 1918, for the entire state, and they show the reported cases of influenza by weeks (Fig. 1); reported deaths from influenza and pneumonia by weeks (Fig. 2); deaths from influenza and pneumonia by age groups (Fig. 3); and the number of influenza and pneumonia deaths, with death rate, in individual towns of more than 5,000 population (Fig. 4).

While these tables illustrate the course of the epidemic during its most violent period, they do not show its full effects, for many thousands of cases, resulting in upwards of two thousand deaths, occurred in this state during the first four months of the present year. Many months must elapse before fully authenticated death reports will enable the State Department of Health to compile complete and accurate data of Connecticut's toll in the great pandemic.

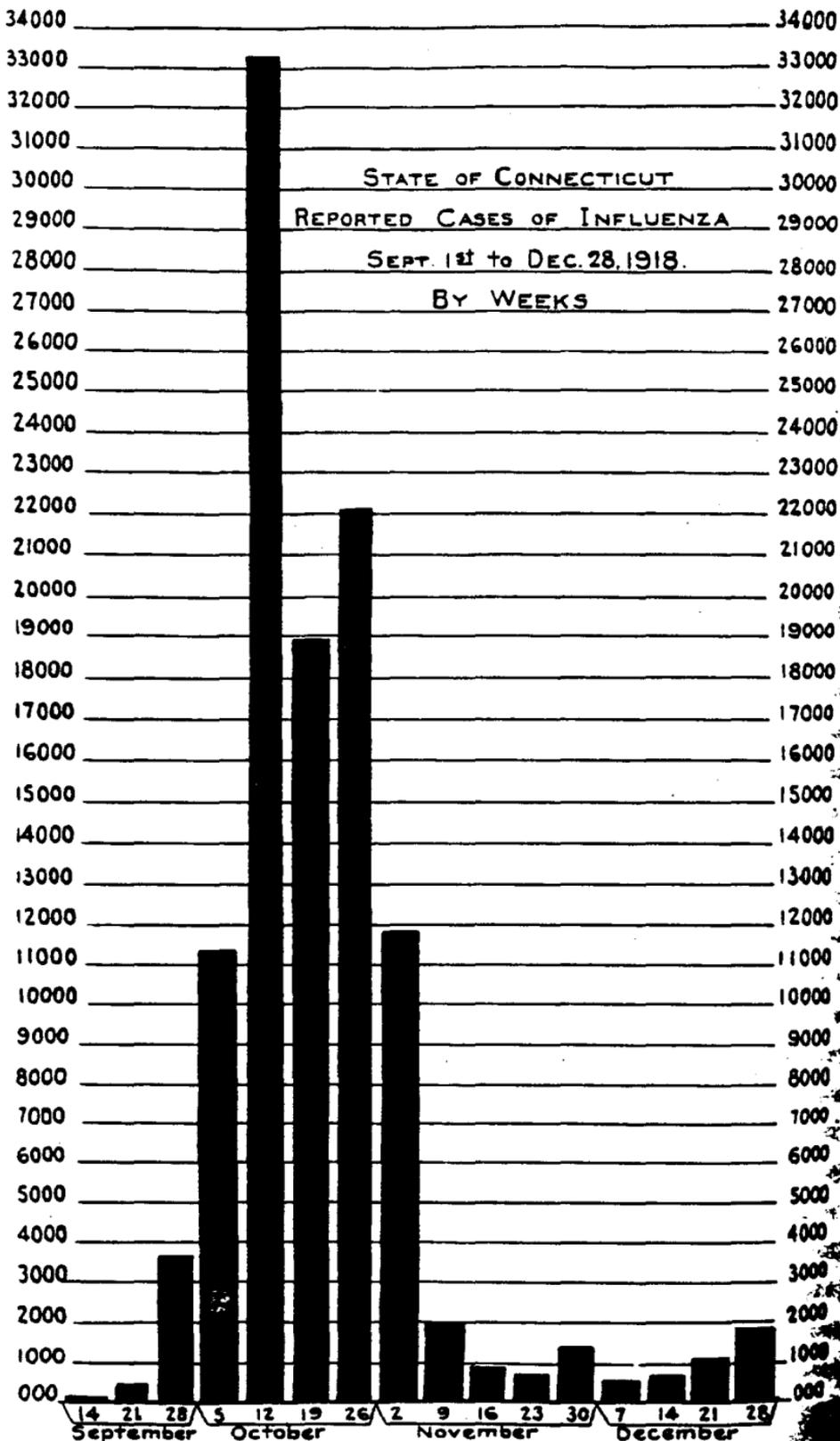


Fig. 1—Reported Cases of Influenza, Sept. 1 to Dec. 28, 1918

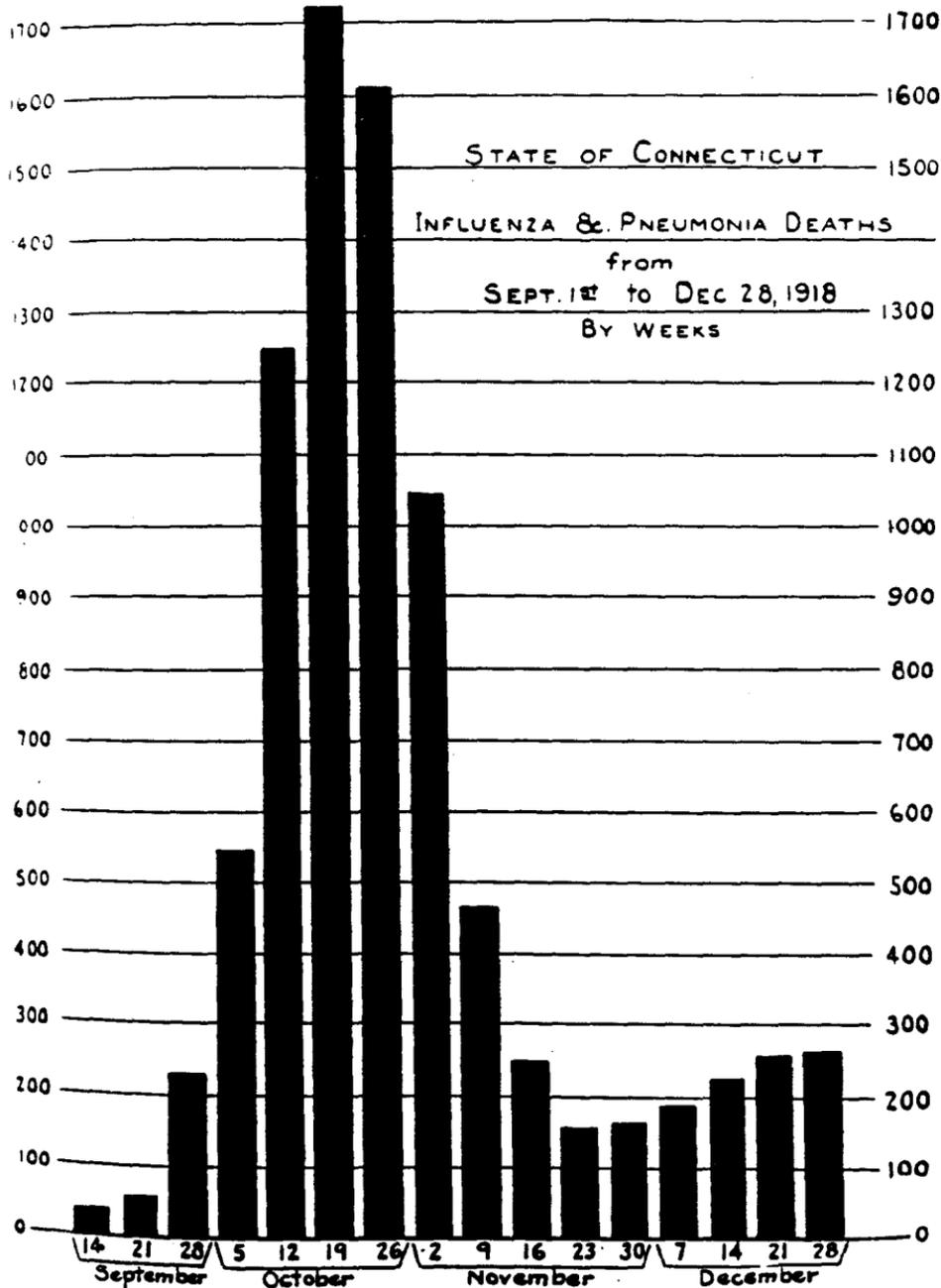


Fig. 2—Influenza and Pneumonia Deaths, Sept. 1 to Dec. 28, 1918

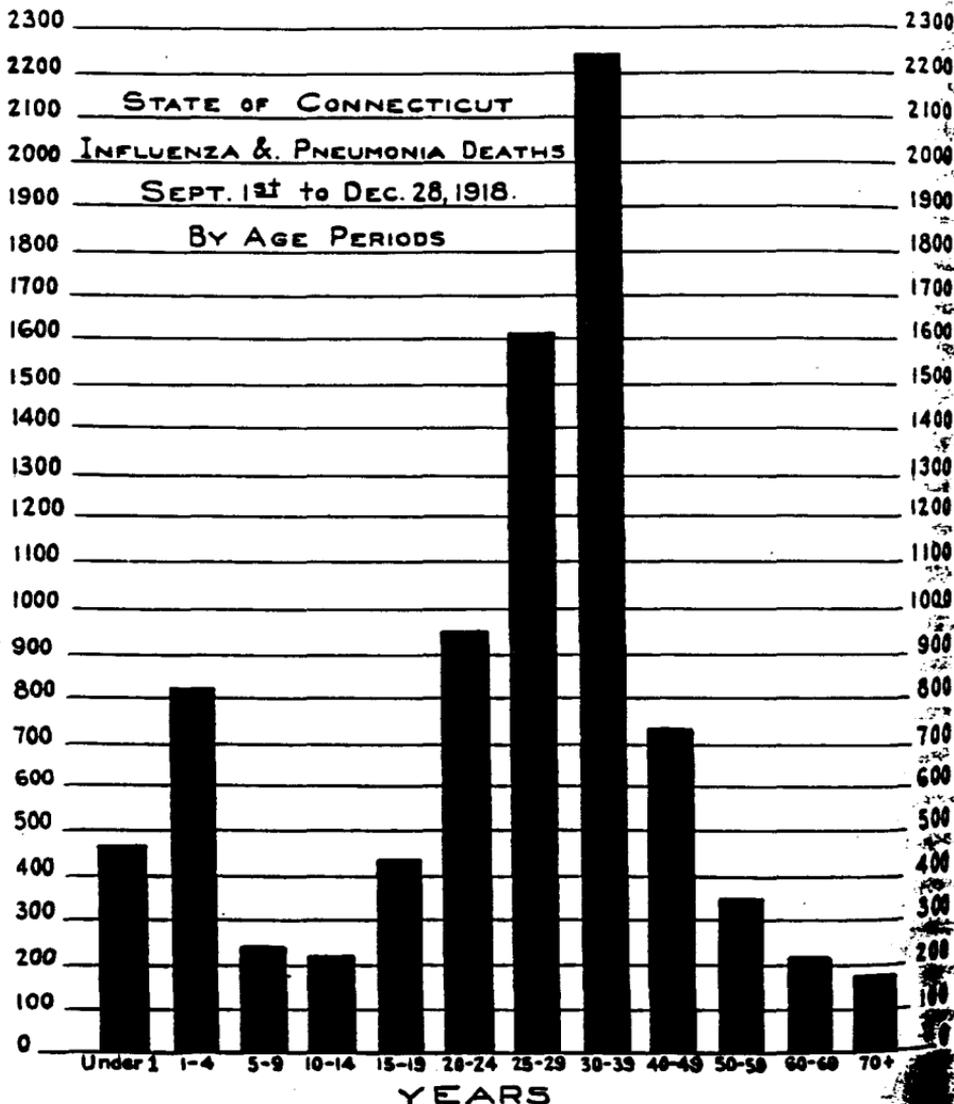


Fig. 3—Influenza and Pneumonia Deaths by Age Periods

Deaths from Influenza and Pneumonia

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September 1 to December 28, 1918, by Towns and Months.

Towns	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total	Death Rate per 1000 pop.
Ansonia.....	14	87	20	11	132	7.5
Berlin.....	1	10	6	2	19	3.5
Branford.....	1	10	22	1	34	4.7
Bridgeport.....	12	361	406	91	870	5.7
Bristol.....	2	88	16	7	113	5.7
Danbury.....	1	70	34	14	119	4.9
Darien.....		4	7	2	13	1.5
Derby.....	8	104	17	4	133	13.1
East Hartford..	2	21	9	3	35	3.2
Enfield.....		29	20	8	57	4.8
Fairfield.....	1	16	33	9	59	4.9
Glastonbury....		4	5	4	13	2.0
Greenwich.....		72	37	12	121	6.4
Groton.....	6	26	11	8	51	7.0
Hamden.....		22	11	2	35	3.7
Hartford.....	51	550	203	108	912	7.0
Killingly.....	5	22	6	1	34	4.5
Manchester.....		44	9	8	61	3.6
Meriden.....	5	216	36	14	271	8.4
Middletown....	7	131	49	26	213	7.9
Milford.....	1	10	9	5	25	2.4
Naugatuck.....	1	104	14	8	127	9.2
New Britain....	7	342	81	36	466	7.9
New Haven.....	18	479	324	151	972	6.0
New London....	51	142	28	14	235	9.1
New Milford....		9	7		16	3.0
Norwalk.....	1	97	55	22	175	6.1
Norwich.....	39	161	12	11	223	7.6
Orange.....	1	37	16	21	75	4.5
Plainfield.....	1	18	7		26	3.1
Plymouth.....		31	7	5	43	5.9
Putnam.....	2	24	18	3	47	5.6
Seymour.....		59	12	2	73	11.4
Shelton.....	7	29	5	3	44	5.1
Southington....	1	17	22	7	47	5.0
Stafford.....		4	6	2	12	1.9
Stamford.....	2	136	56	43	237	5.8
Stonington....	3	31	2	11	47	4.4
Stratford.....	1	16	19	6	42	3.2
Torrington....		43	48	35	126	5.8
Vernon.....		53	10	4	67	7.5
Wallingford....	6	36	3	2	47	3.9
Waterbury.....	10	654	178	55	897	8.8
Watertown.....		22	7	3	32	5.2
West Hartford..		32	10	12	54	7.2
Westport.....		16	4	7	27	5.0
Winchester....	1	33	15	4	53	5.3
Windham.....	17	127	2	6	152	10.7
Windsor.....	1	13	13	2	29	4.4
Towns under 5000	36	454	166	121	777	3.6
Total for State	323	5116	2115	934	8488	6.0

Fig. 4

The Visible and the Invisible Toll of Influenza

The epidemic of influenza was a blasting thing, many times more devastating than the war. It was proportionately as harmful to the population of Connecticut as was any year of the war to any of the belligerents engaged. Consideration of the effect of the epidemic must not stop with the mere enumeration of the deaths. Its sinister characteristic was that it took the strong and the able. It took the potential fathers and mothers. Passing lightly the very young and almost ignoring the old, it aimed straight at the very flower of the flock, selecting the ones on whom the race depends for its present economic strength and its future replacement.

The following table, which compares by age groups the deaths in Connecticut from all causes during the last seventeen weeks of 1918 and the corresponding period of 1917, shows forcibly the havoc wrought among those at the age where life has its greatest value to the family and the nation:

Deaths from All Causes for Period September 1 to December 28, 1918, Compared with Same Period 1917.

AGE GROUPS	Total Deaths Sept. 1 to Dec. 28 All Causes		Excess Deaths in 1918	Deaths from Influenza and Pneumonia 1918	Percentage of each age group to total deaths	
	1917	1918			1917	1918
Under 1 year,	1,091	1,505	414	474	18.2	10.7
1-4 years,	409	1,111	702	816	6.8	7.9
5-9 years,	136	366	230	245	2.3	2.6
10-14 years,	76	295	219	218	1.1	2.1
15-19 years,	108	571	463	433	1.8	4.1
20-24 years,	186	1,130	944	962	3.1	8.1
25-29 years,	202	1,831	1,629	1,602	3.4	13.0
30-39 years,	470	2,688	2,218	2,243	7.8	19.1
40-49 years,	571	1,275	704	732	9.5	9.1
50-59 years,	672	991	319	361	11.2	7.1
60-69 years,	840	924	84	215	13.9	6.6
70 yrs. and over,	1,242	1,370	128	186	20.6	9.6

The total number of deaths in this period of 1917 was 6,003; in 1918, 14,057, an increase of 8,054. The heaviest toll fell upon those between the ages of 20 and 40 years. The total deaths among this group in 1917, for the period covered by the table, was 858; in 1918, 5,649. This represents nearly 60% of all the deaths resulting from influenza and pneumonia.

Statistics show the visible effects of the epidemic, but they cannot show its effect on the birth rate, which is the vital and fundamental fact of racial and national life. The vast army of the unborn, lost to the race by the deaths of potential parents, must be accounted the great invisible toll of the epidemic. A person dying during the age of fecundity may figure on the deficit side of population statistics for a period of twenty-five or thirty years; a baby not born figures for fifty or sixty years. The sum of the dead, ghastly as it is in a human way, and devastating as it is in an economic way, is negligible in the life of the state compared to the effect of influenza on our future birth rate.



The great outstanding fact of the epidemic is this:

Despite the frightful toll of Influenza, the death rate for the year 1918 was no higher than in the years before the various states had established special departments to safeguard the public health.