

# Studies Question Transmission of 1918 Spanish Flu

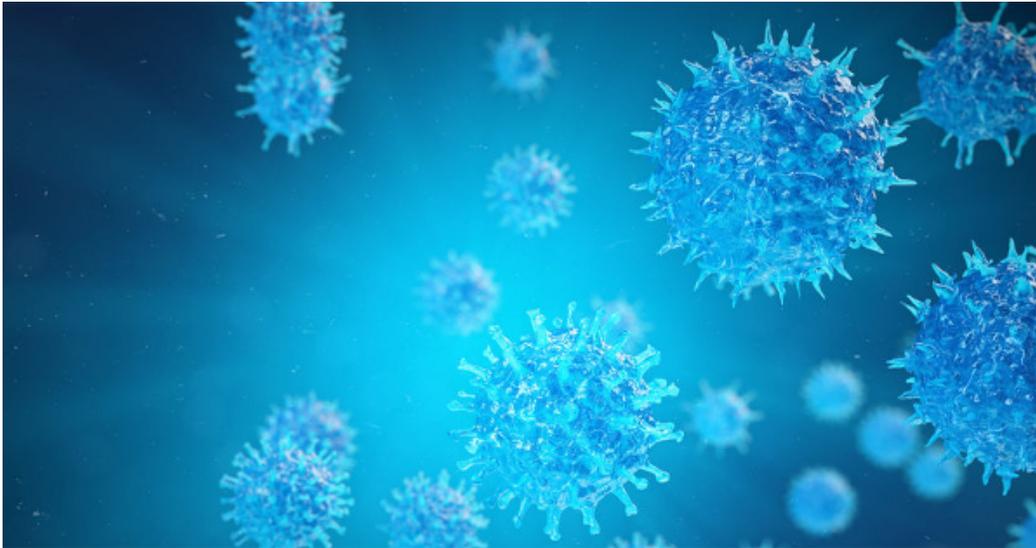
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***The 1918 Spanish flu is said to have been one of the most highly virulent, contagious diseases of all time, but when researchers attempted to spread it from person to person -- by directly spraying "infectious" secretions into people's noses, eyes and throats -- no one got sick***

The 1918 flu pandemic, also known as the Spanish flu, is considered to be one of the most severe pandemics in history. Said to have been caused by an **H1N1 virus** (</disease/h1n1-infection>) that originated in birds, it spread around the globe from 1918 to 1919, infecting about 500 million people, or one-third of the world's population at that time. An estimated 50 million people were said to have died due to the 1918 flu pandemic, 675,000 of them in the U.S.<sup>[i]</sup>

To this day, there remain many questions about this pandemic and the virus that is said to have caused it. "While the 1918 H1N1 virus has been synthesized and evaluated, the properties that made it so devastating are not well understood," the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) admits.<sup>[iii]</sup>

Although the 1918 H1N1 virus was said to be highly virulent and spread via human contact, what is even more curious is that laboratory experiments were never able to confirm this. In fact, when researchers took every measure they could think of to infect people with the virus, they were unsuccessful, calling into question whether it was, in fact, spread from person to person.

## **Scientists Fail to Infect Other Humans With 1918 Spanish Flu**

Infecting humans with a flu virus for the sake of medical research is no longer deemed ethical, but this wasn't the case during the 1918 to 1919 pandemic, when Dr. Milton Rosenau, an infectious disease expert, conducted human experiments on U.S. Navy sailors in cooperation with the Public Health Service and the U.S. Navy.<sup>[iiii]</sup>

Volunteers from the U.S. Naval Training Station in Deer Island, Boston, who "appeared to be in excellent physical condition," took part in the study,<sup>[iv]</sup> which consisted of the scientists attempting to infect the healthy volunteers with the flu. To do this, they collected various secretions from people sick with the flu -- nasal secretions, mucous from their throats and even direct coughing in the face -- and exposed the volunteers.

The donors were said to be early in the disease, within the first, second or third day, to ensure they would still be contagious. The infectious substances were then sprayed into the volunteers' nostrils, throat and eyes, and then the researchers waited 10 days for them to become ill -- but "none of them took sick in any way."<sup>[v]</sup> Writing in the journal *Public Health Reports*, John Eyler, Ph. D., of the University of Minnesota, explained:

***"[Volunteers] ... were inoculated with mixtures of other organisms isolated from the throats and noses of influenza patients. Next, some volunteers received injections of blood from influenza patients. Finally, 13 of the volunteers were taken into an influenza ward and exposed to 10 influenza patients each.***

***Each volunteer was to shake hands with each patient, to talk with him at close range, and to permit him to cough directly into his face. None of the volunteers in these experiments developed influenza."***<sup>[vi]</sup>

Other research has also failed to show human-to-human transmission of **influenza (/disease/influenza-0)**, with one 2003 review conducted by U.S. CDC scientists and colleagues concluding, "Our review found no human experimental studies published in the English-language literature delineating person-to-person transmission of influenza."<sup>[vii]</sup>

Edwin Jordan, a public health scientist who conducted some of the most well-known research into the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic,<sup>[viii]</sup> also reported in 1927 that five studies failed to demonstrate sick-to-well transmission of influenza.

"Jordan reports that all five studies failed to support sick-to-well transmission, in spite of having numerous acutely ill influenza patients, in various stages of their illness, carefully cough, spit, and breathe on a combined total of >150 well patients," according to a review published in *Virology* in 2008.<sup>[ix]</sup> Rosenau's study was the largest among them.

## **Scientists Caution Against Concluding the Obvious**

Even after failing to infect people with the flu despite multiple direct exposures, Rosenau stated, "We must be very careful not to draw any positive conclusions from the negative results of this kind."<sup>[x]</sup> At the same time, he acknowledged:

***"We entered the outbreak with a notion that we knew the cause of the disease, and were quite sure we knew how it was transmitted from person to person. Perhaps, if we have learned anything, it is that we are not quite sure what we know about the disease."***<sup>[xi]</sup>

Their report documented eight other studies that also failed to identify how the Spanish flu was spread, but said perhaps other factors were involved relating to how the virus was discharged from or entered the body. Perhaps, some suggested, the volunteers were already immune. But some of the volunteers were specifically included because they had no prior exposure to influenza.

Others suggested that the virus donors may have no longer been infectious, but the patients were said to have been within their first three days of illness, when viral shedding should be at its peak.<sup>[xii]</sup> "It seemed that what was acknowledged to be one of the most contagious of communicable diseases could not be transferred under experimental conditions," Eyler wrote.<sup>[xiii]</sup>

Their study effectively showed that the **1918 Spanish flu (/article/1918-influenza-pandemic-combination-fresh-air-sunlight-and-scrupulous-standard)** was not a **contagious disease (/blog/why-only-thing-influenza-may-kill-germ-theory)**, but they still theorized that perhaps if they had been more aggressive in exposing the volunteers (more aggressive than directly spraying "infectious" nasal secretions up someone's nose?), they would have gotten a different result.

It's even been suggested that perhaps the donors didn't actually have the flu at all, but it's believed that physicians were highly capable of diagnosing influenza in 1918, and all the donors were symptomatic, making this highly unlikely. "Obviously, another explanation is that sick-to-well transmission is not the usual mode of contagion," the *Virology Journal* review added.<sup>[xiv]</sup>

Indeed, the real disease here appears to be in researchers believing what they want to believe -- in this case that the Spanish flu was easily transmitted from person to person -- even if the science clearly says otherwise.

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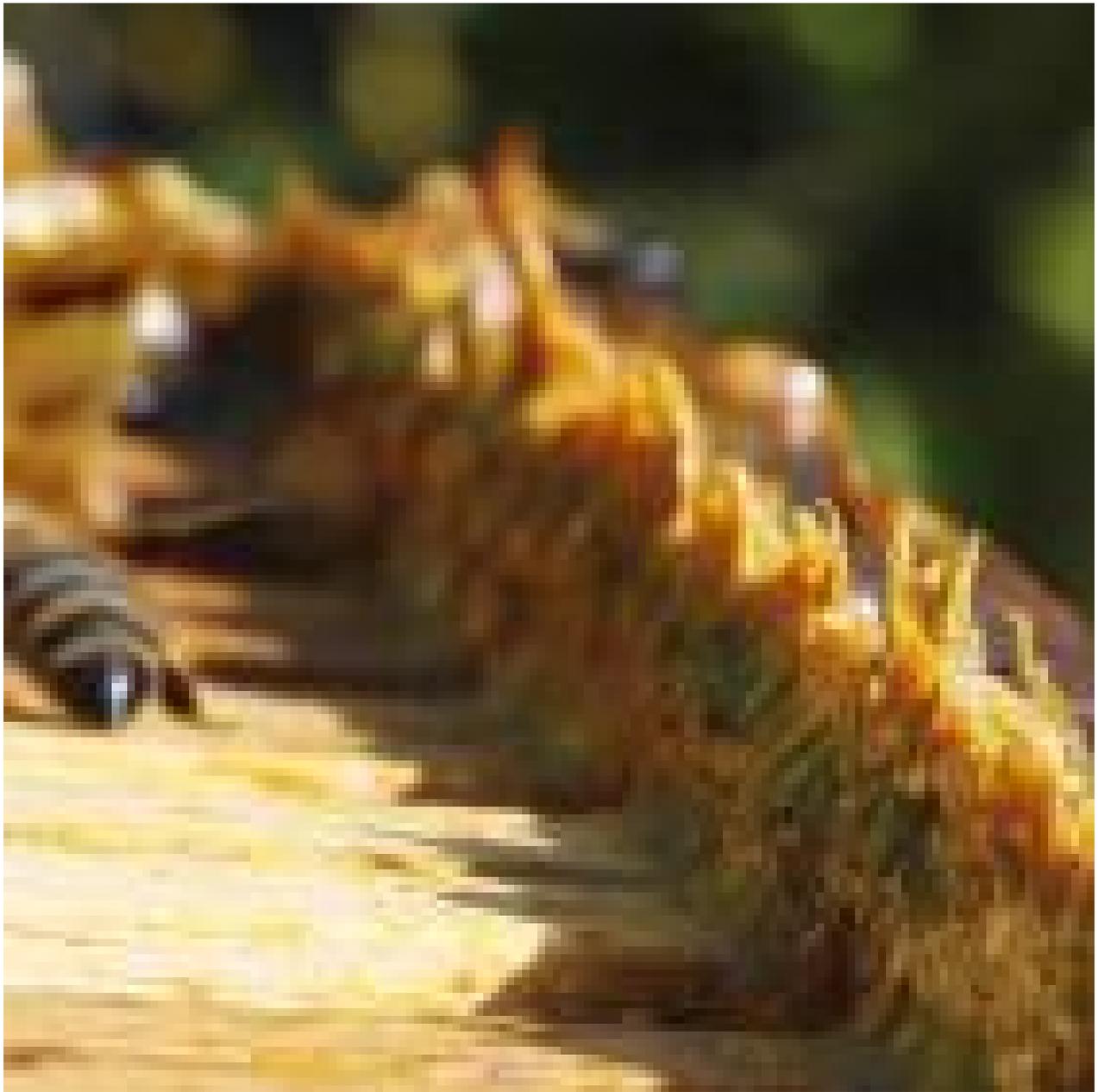
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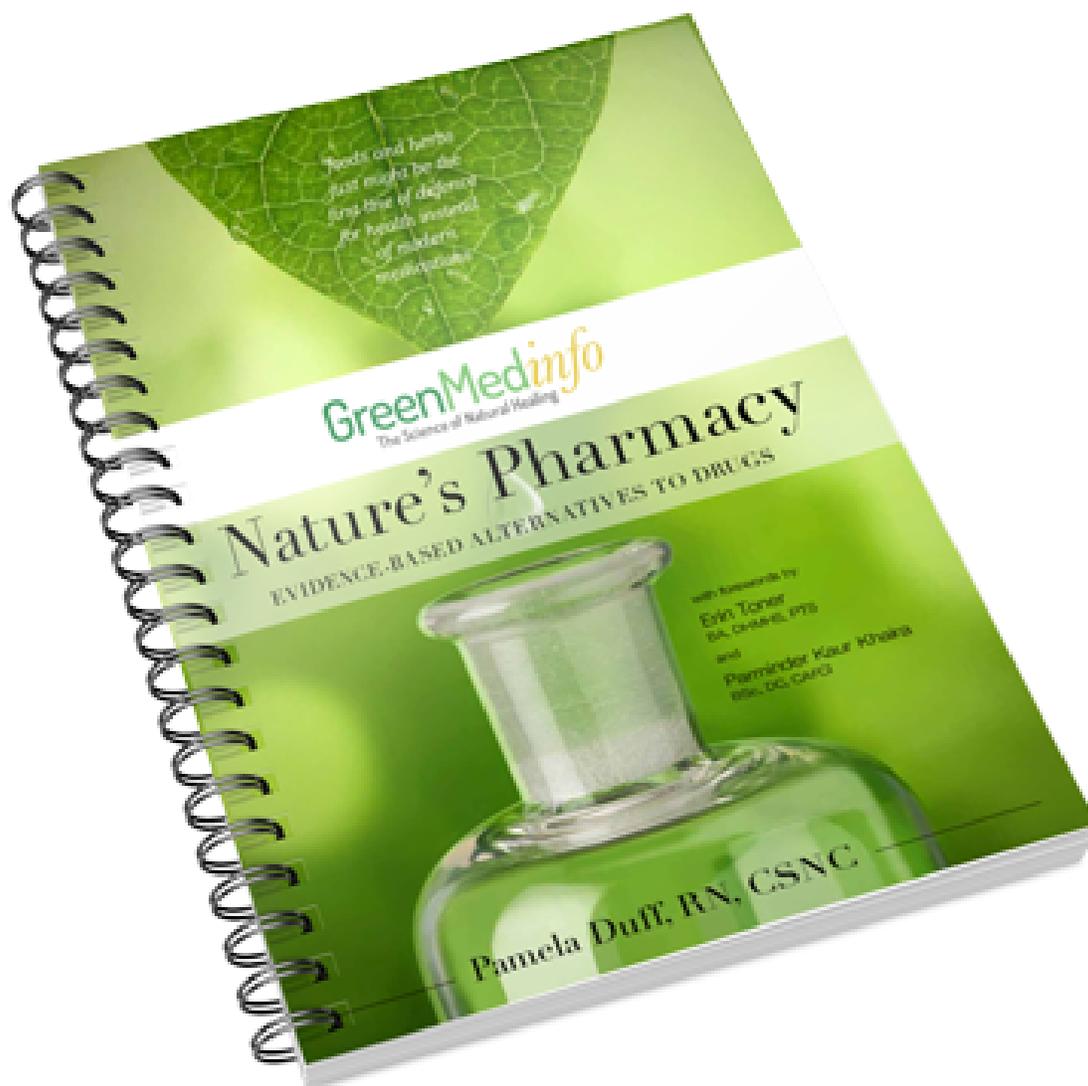
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