

Three Flu Pandemics Hit in 20th Century

1918-1919 “Spanish” Flu:

Worldwide, 20-30 millions died—more than were killed in World War I. In the United States, over 500,000 died.

1957-1958 “Asian” Flu: This pandemic affected between 10% and 35% of the world’s population, with at least 100,000 deaths.

1968-1969 “Hong Kong” Flu: In the world as a whole, this pandemic killed an estimated 700,000 people. In the United States, at least 34,000 deaths were attributable to it.

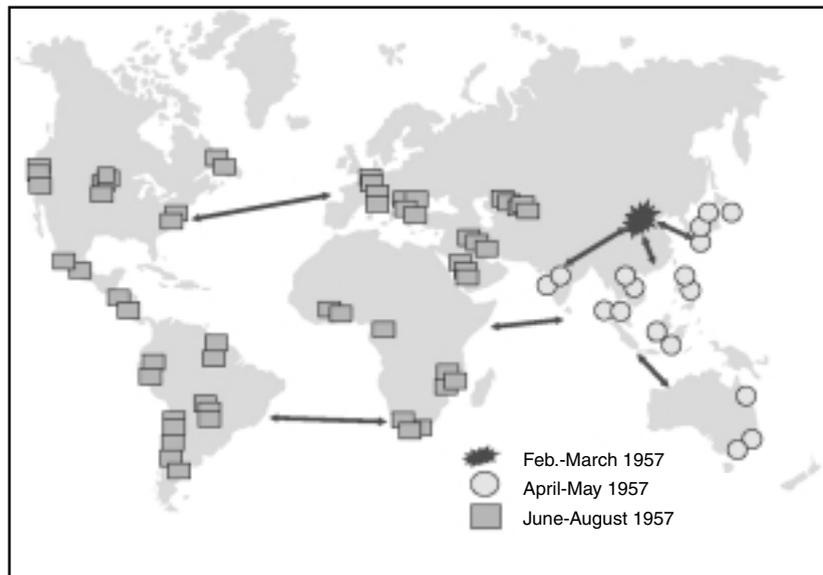
PAHO Warns of New Strain

The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) called for an action plan to deal with a potential “new influenza strain” on Sept. 25, 2004 at its meeting of hemispheric health ministers, who came to Washington, D.C. for PAHO’s 44th Directing Council. A report was presented to the group, saying that the “sudden and marked change in Influenza virus A should be considered one of the greatest public health concerns” in the Americas. The report warned of “novel, distinct sub-types, in a process known as antigenic shift.” Thus, the danger comes from the prospect of an abrupt, new virus strain, to which populations have no resistance, and for which no existing vaccine may provide protection.

The report said, “Recent episodes of animal strains causing disease in humans support experts’ views that a new pandemic is inevitable. . . . Epidemiological studies project that another

FIGURE 1

Spread of H2N2 Influenza ‘Asian Flu’ in 1957



Source: WHO Global Influenza Programme.

pandemic is most likely to result in . . . 280,000 to 650,000 deaths in less than two years—in industrialized countries alone.”

PAHO, founded in 1902, is the world’s oldest public health organization. It serves as the regional office for WHO in the Americas.

Only eight nations in the Americas give flu vaccinations to the elderly: Canada, U.S.A., Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile.

—Marcia Merry Baker