



**NEVADA  
HEALTH  
RESPONSE**

## **Echoes of the past: the 1918 Influenza Epidemic in Nevada**

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The COVID-19 outbreak doesn't represent the first quarantine order implemented in Nevada to combat an infectious disease.

Similar to COVID-19, the 1918 Influenza Epidemic spread around the world. The epidemic arrived in Nevada in the spring of 1918 and returned even deadlier in October and November that year before tapering off in the spring of 1919.

After several confirmed cases became public in Washoe County in October 1918, government ordered the closure of Reno's high school, theaters, churches, saloons and other locations of large gatherings. Dr. M. A. Robinson, a member of the city's board of health, was quoted in the Reno Evening Gazette saying, "Precautions must be taken and everyone is asked to cooperate with the health authorities in keeping the disease from spreading."

The Western Shoshone Agency instructed members of the tribe to "not go to the store unless it is necessary," adding, "if you have to go to the store or office your wants will be attended to on the porches."

Children were "not allowed to mingle on the play grounds" and the University of Nevada, Reno implemented a campus-wide quarantine, according to newspaper reports. Initially, grade schools remained open with students leaving every other seat open — an early-20th century form of social distancing — but they eventually closed. Hotels, schools and fraternal lodges around the state were converted into temporary hospitals.

University of Nevada President Walter Ernest Clark issued the following order: "Beginning (Oct. 11)...a military guard will be set about campus and no one will be allowed to go from the campus or to come on the campus except by express permission."

At the time of UNR's quarantine, Reno had a handful of confirmed cases, and no confirmed cases on campus, but university officials felt the threat of the flu demanded a serious response to "check the spread."

The epidemic also reached Tonopah where nine people died in the second weekend of November, the same week Germany signed an armistice agreement with the Allies to end World War I.

In all, Nevada had 4,000 confirmed cases, according to the Nevada health board, in a state with a total population of about 80,000 people. The 1918 flu killed about 675,000 nationwide. Most estimates put the total death count worldwide at between 20 to 50 million.

In 2018, the Nevada State Museum in Las Vegas created an exhibit for the centennial of the 1918 Influenza. The exhibit noted that the 1918 flu killed 40 of Las Vegas' 2,000 residents, but those numbers are believed to be low because many who died with pneumonia during that time were not included in the total count.

While COVID-19 has proved most deadly for the elderly and people with underlying health conditions, the 1918 flu was deadliest for people between the ages of 15 and 45, according to the exhibit.

The number of COVID-19 confirmed cases in Nevada reached 2,700, as of April 11, with 102 deaths, according to the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services.

“We will undoubtedly face hardship,” Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak said in reference to COVID-19. “There will be a loss of income. Families and individuals will be inconvenienced. I ask every Nevadan to call your neighbors, call and check on the elderly who may be alone and in need. Together, we will get through this challenging time.”

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