

The influenza pandemic of 1918 was called the "Spanish flu" likely because only Spanish newspapers were publishing accounts of the spread of this disease. Unlike other western countries, Spain, a neutral country during World War I, had no newspaper censorship. This worldwide pandemic reportedly infected 28% of Americans with a mortality rate of about 2.5% of those infected, whereas earlier influenza epidemics probably killed about 0.1% of those stricken. During the fall and winter period of 1918-1919 an estimated 675,000 Americans died, with 200,000 expiring in October 1918 alone. Of the total stricken, reportedly 43,000 were servicemen mobilizing to fight in World War I. In the United States this pandemic primarily struck people between the ages of 20 and 40, not the children and elderly who are usually afflicted. An estimated 20 to 40 million people died worldwide from this pandemic, approximately one-fifth of the world's population. Prior pandemics such as the Black Death (bubonic plague) of the middle ages did not come close to the worldwide impact of this influenza pandemic. In 2005 researchers were able to reconstruct the pandemic's flu virus, using some of the material preserved at the time. They showed that the Spanish flu was a mutated avian flu that was originally found in birds and fowl, and jumped to the human species.