

# The Spanish Influenza Epidemic In Winnipeg During October and November 1918

The Spanish Influenza is probably one of the least known incidents in Winnipeg's history and world history considering how many individuals were dramatically affected.

The population of the earth in 1918 was approximately 2 billion, some researchers estimate that half the population of the world came down with the flu at some time during 1918 and 1919. The death rate estimates reach from 20 million to 100 million. There may have been 10 million to 20 million deaths each in both China and India. Even the lowest death rate estimates indicate that many more people died from the influenza than died from the fighting in World War One. More people died in 6 months from influenza than have died from aids since the 1970's.

In Canada an estimated 50-60 thousand citizens died, almost as many who died fighting on the Western Front during 4 years of fighting. Canada was a country of less than 9 million during this time with perhaps several million coming down with the flu yet most people today know almost nothing about it.

One of the most frightening features was that the flu hit young adults and those in good health especially hard. The majority of the deaths occurred among this group, normally the young, the old and those with underlying medical conditions are the hardest hit but not in this case.

The City of Winnipeg within the borders of 1918 had 179,867 in the census of 1921. The population within the present boundaries of the City of Winnipeg contained 227,980 individuals in that same census; Manitoba's population in 1921 was 610,118.

The following information from the Winnipeg Tribune and the Manitoba Free Press, as the Winnipeg Free Press was called until 1931, during the worst of the epidemic in October and November 1918 as.

The edition of Tuesday October 1 brought the first news of the influenza to Winnipeg. It had been raging out of control in Eastern Canada and it traveled west along the rail lines. On September 30, twenty-three westbound soldiers were taken off the train in Winnipeg suffering from the influenza and immediately placed in isolation at the I.O.D.E (International Order of the Daughters of the Empire) Hospital in Winnipeg.

October 3 brought the first ad for a product to combat influenza Polusterine. The instruction stated, dilute it in water and gargle. It can also be used in the bath as a sure preventive against influenza, "La Grippe" and colds etc.

October 5 brought a statement from J. Douglas, Chief Medical Officer in Winnipeg, that 2 cases of civilians having influenza had been reported to him.

October 8 brought the first reports of death in Winnipeg as 2 soldiers from the September 30 westbound train had died. They had died on October 6 from pneumonia. There were now 26 soldiers in quarantine in the I.O.D.E Hospital. Two other soldiers stationed in Winnipeg now were infected, two other residents of the hospital were reported as dangerously ill. The first case of a civilian in Winnipeg having the disease was reported to belonging to a woman living on Guelph Avenue, she had recently returned from a trip to Montreal. Her house was quarantined and placard, as all homes of victims would be.

October 9 reported 5 more cases of influenza with 31 people under treatment.

October 10 there was a third death reported in Winnipeg a third soldier at the I.O.D.E. Hospital.

October 11, Provincial and City Health Official stated that in the very near future there will be an order issued to close all schools, theatres, churches and prohibit all public meetings and public gatherings. There were 7 new cases reported and all universities and colleges in Winnipeg in St. Boniface were now closed. The first case of a person who had not traveled from outside Winnipeg was now reported. A resident of Clifton Avenue was reported to be in critical condition, the boarder in his home had also come down with the flu.

Four more cases had developed among the soldiers of Fort Osborne Barracks. The Manitoba Board of Health issued a warning. The symptoms included, fever, backache, inflamed throat and often bleeding from the nose. In severe cases there was a troublesome cough with a sense of constriction in the chest from this, bronchia-pneumonia could develop. People were warned to stay away from people who had it. If you came down with it you were told to go to bed immediately, take in warm drinks and live on fluids. People looking after all individuals with it were told to wear gauze masks.

On the evening of October 11, theatre owners met to discuss the growing health emergency and their response to it.

October 12, a proclamation came into effect at 12 Midnight closing all theatres, schools, churches, libraries, dance halls, city public baths and all public meeting places indefinitely. The anti spitting bylaw is to be strictly enforced, fines can be up to \$50.00 plus costs or jail time. Department stores and other stores, streetcars, dining rooms and cafes remain open but are subject to emergency regulations. Railway trains will be searched for signs of sick patients. The areas under these closures and special regulations include the Cities of Winnipeg and St. Boniface, the Municipalities of East Kildonan, North Kildonan, Weston, Brooklands, St James, Charleswood, Tuxedo, St Vital, Fort Garry and Transcona.

Twenty-two new cases of influenza are reported and as a result a special flu building is set aside at Winnipeg's General Hospital known as the south building. It is to hold 50

patients including two nursing sisters from the Tuxedo Hospital who were themselves in charge of influenza cases.

October 14, there are now another 26 new cases making 79 cases in total in Winnipeg, this does not include military cases. There are now 16 homes affected some with 3 or 4 family members affected.

There are new measures taken, all streetcars are to be disinfected every 24 hours, all the windows on the streetcars are to be left open at all times regardless of the weather. Billiard rooms and bowling lanes are closed indefinitely. Citizens are forbidden to congregate on streets and many are now wearing gauze masks.

October 15, there are 25 additional cases in Winnipeg bringing the number of cases to 106. Ashdown's advertises a disinfectant spray for \$5.00 per gallon. The instructions include spraying the interiors of buildings frequently.

October 16, the number of new cases in Winnipeg expand by 44 bringing the number of cases to 150, this does not include military cases. Visitors are now banned from Winnipeg General Hospital, the Middlechurch Home and all other institutions plan to take the same measures. People buying clothes are asked to shop carefully, as merchants are becoming reluctant to accept returns or exchanges.

Advertisements for "Izal" appear a germicide available in soaps, powder or fluid form. The slogan is "Make your home flu proof."

October 17 – A ban comes into effect in all of Greater Winnipeg closing all schools, theatres, churches and other public meeting places while there are thirty-four more cases in Winnipeg and three deaths, the ages of the deceased are 22, 20 and 19. Trains from the east are stopped and inspected before they enter Manitoba. C.P.R. trains are stopped and inspected at Kenora Ontario. C.N.R. trains are stopped and inspected at Rainy Lake Ontario. All passengers showing any sign of sickness are taken off before the trains are allowed to continue their journey. This does not prevent further people from being infected as travelers often become sick after the inspections are carried out. Three such passengers are taken off a C.N.R. train arriving in Winnipeg and are taken to the General Hospital.

Six nurses at the General Hospital treating patients come down with the flu. Lady members of the St. John's Ambulance are asked to work in the hospitals.

More advertisements appear in the newspaper offering prevention of the flu they include "Peroxide Hydrogen" an antiseptic for use in the nose and throat costing 49 cents.

"Rexall Catarrh" spray complex costing \$1.25.

"Oil Eucalyptus" 15 cents

"Retal" Nasal Spray" 50 cents

"Listerine", 25 cents, 50 cents and \$1.00

October 18, the number of cases in Winnipeg is now up to 258 as 74 new cases are reported.

October 19, 72 new cases and 2 deaths bring the total to 8 deaths and 330 cases.

The Riga Purgative Water Company of Montreal lists 8 ways to prevent the flu they include.

1. Do not get frightened beyond measure, be prudent look for subjects of conversation other than the flu, observe elementary rules of hygiene.
2. Avoid crowds, meetings or gatherings of people, which may bring contagion.
3. Keep your bedroom window open at night and that of your office during the day.
4. Choose sustaining easily digested food and chew it properly.
5. Always wash your hands before meals.
6. Breathe the air to the full extend of your lungs, breathe through your nose not through your mouth, get into the sunshine it kills germs and walk to your workplace if possible.
7. Use saline gargles morning and night, vaporize your nose with liquid Vaseline containing camphor, methol and eucalyptol.
8. Keep the digestive tract and bowels clean by taking every morning a glass of Riga Purgative Water, which ensures without pains in the stomach without qualms or irritation the freedom of bowels giving you health.

October 18 there are another 108 new cases bringing the Winnipeg total up to 438. A vaccine is now being tried as 200 doctors and nurses in the General Hospital are vaccinated along with 59 flu victims. Large amounts of vaccine are ordered and some experts recommend that everyone take it. The Kennedy Avenue Branch of the Red Cross is closed due to the large number of persons congregating there.

There are reports that some private nurses are charging the sky-high amount of \$35.00 per week to look after the sick in their own homes. The Dominion of Canada Guarantee and Accident Insurance Company tells policyholders that their sickness policy covers the Spanish Influenza.

October 22 there are additional 96 new cases in Winnipeg bringing the total cases to 538, 1 more death is reported bringing the total to 10. It is reported that all the hospitals in the Winnipeg area are filled to capacity and above. A new temporary emergency hospital is to be opened on Logan Avenue. It is designed to hold 200 patients staffed by volunteers but will it will hold nearly 500 patients during the peak of the influenza. Young women working for St. John's Ambulance are to make home visits under the supervision of a nurse.

October 23, the number of new cases climbs by another 75 victims.

October 25 new cases are up another 81 to 740 so far including 15 deaths reported.

October 26 there are 20 deaths reported so far and 95 new cases bringing the total up 835.

October 28, the infection rate continues to climb, there are now 1006 cases and 28 deaths. The Free Press lists the civilian cases by age and the total number of deaths by age category so far.

Ages	Cases	Deaths
5 and under	69	1
6-10	59	0
11-15	57	0
16-20	82	6
21-30	227	14
31-40	143	5
41-50	44	2
51-60	10	1
61+	4	0

All courts cases are now postponed until the emergency is over. The militia department commandeers the La Salle Hotel in Elmwood to house sick soldiers as all 134 beds of the I.O.D.E Hospital are full

October 29 the King George Hospital Annex on Logan Ave East is opened. An appeal is made to all married women who were trained as nurses to volunteer for nursing duties. The policy of having all newly married women quit is temporally dropped. A new ward at the General Hospital for 25 patients is opened. The St. Boniface City Hall is closed in order to disinfect it with formalin.

October 30, there are 265 new cases in Winnipeg; the total number of cases is up to 1462 including 50 deaths. The Misericordia Hospital opens a new annex for flu patients. It is reported that 20 nurses and 1 intern at the General Hospital are now patients themselves. There are 2 new cases reported in East Kildonan bringing the total to 10 there. Houses are placarded on Melbourne, Jamison and Bowman in East Kildonan. The campaign for the latest Victory Loan continues but all those going door to door are ordered to wear masks.

October 31 outside the Greater Winnipeg region the situation is even worse, there are now 118 cases in Portage La Prairie, in Brandon there are 176 cases. In Winnipeg there are 270 new cases, the death total is now 61, the total number of cases is 1732. St. Boniface reports 28 cases, 12 now in East Kildonan and 3 in West Kildonan.

November 1, the number of new cases in Winnipeg explodes by 430 and 8 deaths are reported. There have now been 2167 cases and 69 deaths. St James reports 50 individuals with the flu. A very serious shortage of nurses is reported in all hospitals as many regular nurses are sidelined by the flu. The Women's Volunteer Reserve reports 27 of its members in voluntary nursing positions. Six businesswomen have volunteered along with 22 other volunteer female nurses.

November 2 Saturday brings 553 new cases, 8 more deaths, and 2715 cases so far, 77 deaths, and 1876 cases in the last week. One doctor in the North End brings in a list with 61 new cases. St James now reports over 60 cases and 1 death, St. Boniface 54 cases, East Kildonan reports 9 new cases. One religious denomination the Christian Scientists are reporting to be defying the ban on gatherings.

November 4 there are 312 new cases and 4 deaths in Winnipeg. Since October 3 there have been 3139 cases and 96 deaths. St. Boniface has 124 new cases bringing its total to 178. Fifteen Grey Nuns and 105 children at the St. Boniface Orphanage are ill with the flu. The East Kildonan Health Officer Dr. R.S. McMunn blames many of the new cases in the Greater Winnipeg area on the overcrowded streetcars.

November 5 in Winnipeg 591 new cases are reported bringing the number to 3730, 106 of those have now died. St James now reports 90 cases, St Boniface 188 cases including 3 deaths. It is reported that 6 members of the St. Boniface Fire Department have come down with the flu. The Winnipeg School Division reports that 160 teachers have volunteered as nurses. Food is now being provided to homes where the woman is sick.

November 6 the number of cases jumps by the largest amount yet 619 including 20 new deaths bringing the total in Winnipeg to 4329 cases 126 deaths. Two more deaths are reported among the military in Winnipeg. There are 92 new cases of children sick at the St. Joseph's Orphanage on Portage Avenue, out of 152 children only 7 children have not been sick. It is reported that there are only 4 sisters well enough to look after all those children.

St. Boniface reports 231 cases, St. Boniface Hospital is well over normal capacity with patients. Ten Oblate Sisters from Maison Chapelle are helping out the worn out Grey Nuns at St. Boniface Hospital. The Provincial Jail reported that there had been 20 inmates sick but only 10 remained in the prison hospital. There are 16 new cases reported in East Kildonan and 10 new cases in West Kildonan. The C.P.R. reported that 2270 of its employees in Western Canada are ill with the flu. Another urgent appeal is made for volunteer nurse throughout Greater Winnipeg.

November 7 Brandon now reports 267 cases, St. Boniface 240 cases, St. James 94 cases including 1 death, East Kildonan reports a new death. West Kildonan reports over 100 cases in the Home of the Friendless where 10 residents have now died. Winnipeg reports 334 new cases and 21 new deaths. Winnipeg has now recorded 4683 cases and 147 deaths.

November 8 Winnipeg sees 361 new cases and 19 more deaths. St James now reports 104 cases, St. Boniface 240 cases and 6 deaths, 5 at St. Boniface Hospital and 1 among the Grey Nuns at the St. Boniface Orphanage. There are 6 Jesuit Priests working in St. Boniface Hospital in the flu ward. The City Hospitals in Fort Rouge ask for residents to volunteer to transport patients to the hospitals.

November 9 Winnipeg reports 249 new cases and 9 new deaths, 5293 cases since October 3 with 180 deaths. St Boniface reports there have been 244 cases including 7 deaths.

November 11, World War One ends but the health emergency continues over the last 2 days, 374 cases are reported in Winnipeg and 52 more deaths. St. Boniface reports 10 more cases, St James reports the number of cases has exceeded 160. Outside Winnipeg 3248 cases have been reported in Manitoba.

Emergency food distribution centers are set up with the main food station at Alexander School in St. James. Other locations include

1. Lord Selkirk School # 1 in Elmwood at Brazier and Popular
2. Robertson Memorial Institute in the North End at Burrows and McKenzie
3. Weston Sparling Methodist Church in Weston
4. 662 Wellington Crescent in South Winnipeg

November 12 there are 412 new cases reported in Winnipeg with 27 new deaths. St Boniface reports it has had 287 cases and 9 deaths including a St. Boniface City Alderman. Winnipeg has now had a total of 6139 cases and 259 total deaths. It is also reported that 158 families ill with the flu received food on the first day of operation of the emergency food distribution centers. Local scout groups play a large part in the delivery of food including hot soup along with the Salvation Army.

November 13 there are 308 new cases in Winnipeg with 30 new civilian deaths and 2 among the soldiers.

November 14 Winnipeg reports 295 new cases and 17 deaths. Winnipeg has now had 6642 cases and 304 deaths, St. Boniface 334 cases and 13 deaths.

November 15 Winnipeg 361 new cases and 43 deaths, St. Boniface reports 10 new cases. An urgent appeal is put out for bed linen and quilts.

November 16 Winnipeg has 305 new cases and 21 deaths.

November 18 there are 400 new cases and 41 deaths in Winnipeg. Since October 3 there have been 7704 cases and 409 deaths. St Boniface has had 347 cases and 14 deaths. In West Kildonan there are 50 new cases among the inmates of the Home of the Good Shepherd. It is reported that there are more than 6000 flu cases in Manitoba outside of Winnipeg and 2000 of these are in hospitals. On Saturday alone more than 10,000 meals were sent out from the Emergency Flu Kitchen in Alexander School in St. James.

November 19 there are 378 new cases and 26 deaths reported in Winnipeg plus 1 soldier death. The death rate was the highest in the North End. There are 20 cases reported in St. John's College. There are 116 cases reported in Brooklands. St. Boniface reports it has had 367 total cases and 16 deaths. In Greater Winnipeg 389 families received 2 or more meals from the Emergency Kitchens.

November 20 there are 233 new cases and 21 more deaths. Winnipeg has recorded 8315 cases including 456 deaths but 4400 have now been removed from the quarantine.

November 21 another 195 new cases in Winnipeg and 20 more deaths. St. Boniface has recorded 384 cases since October and 21 deaths.

November 22 Winnipeg reports 181 new cases and 17 deaths since October 3 there have been 8917 cases including 514 deaths, St. Boniface 388 cases and 23 deaths.

November 25 it is announced that the theatres and schools in Winnipeg are to reopen on November 28. There are another 209 new cases and 36 deaths.

November 26 the date for the opening of the schools in Winnipeg is pushed back to Monday December 2.

November 27 there are 87 new cases reported and 16 deaths, since October 9453 cases and 580 deaths in Winnipeg but 5842 have officially recovered.

November 28 the ban closing all theatres, churches, public meetings and schools is rescinded in Winnipeg after being closed for 46 days. St. Boniface has recorded 395 cases and 27 deaths. Winnipeg reports 167 new cases and 15 deaths.

November 29 there are 123 new cases in Winnipeg and 14 deaths.

November 30 there are 122 new cases in Winnipeg and 12 more death bringing the number of cases to 9744 and 621 deaths. St Boniface has reported 402 cases and 28 deaths. East Kildonan announces that it will lift its ban on public meetings on December 1 1918 at midnight but East Kildonan's schools will not reopen until Monday December 9. Charleswood announces that it schools will also reopen on December 9.

The worst of the Spanish Influenza was over in the Greater Winnipeg area but the number of cases and deaths continued to rise for a number of months in to 1919. By the end of January 1919 there had been 12,863 cases in the City of Winnipeg and 824 deaths. In January 1919 there were still 973 new cases and 164 deaths. At the end of April 1919 it was reported that at least 971 people died of the Spanish Influenza in the City of Winnipeg and over 14,000 had come down it, this out of an estimated population of 165,000. The true numbers for the area of the present City of Winnipeg will never be known but it is probable that there were somewhere in the area of 1300 deaths by April 1919. Most experts feel that the true numbers were probably under reported.

The most important outcome of the Spanish Influenza was that most of the deaths occurred among young adults and as a result hundreds of children lost at least one parent, some lost both parents. Most people did recover from the epidemic but a significant number never fully recovered their health. The lasting effects of the epidemic were to last for years.



New Cases of Spanish Flu reported in Winnipeg During October and December 1918 and deaths reported by Winnipeg Health Department

	New Cases	Deaths
October 3	2	-
October 7	7	-
October 10	12	1
October 11	18	1
October 12	16	1
October 13	28	1
October 14	25	-
October 15	44	1
October 16	34	3
October 17	74	-
October 18	72	2
October 19	52	1
October 20	56	2
October 21	96	2
October 22	81	1
October 23	44	3
October 24	81	1
October 25	95	5
October 26	95	4
October 27	75	2
October 28	197	9
October 29	255	5
October 30	270	12
October 31	430	13
November 1	553	8
November 2	312	14
November 3	112	14
November 4	591	15
November 5	619	18
November 6	334	17
November 7	317	30
November 8	249	14
November 9	222	35
November 10	96	17
November 11	412	28
November 12	318	32
November 13	295	15
November 14	361	43
November 15	305	21
November 16	259	25

November 17	137	16
November 18	378	27
November 19	233	22
November 20	195	20
November 21	226	21
November 22	181	17
November 23	151	24
November 24	58	12
November 25	225	16
November 26	87	16
November 27	163	15
November 28	123	14
November 29	76	5
November 30	65	7