

Occurrence of Influenza, July 1953 to June 1954

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INVESTIGATORS and diagnostic laboratories located in universities, hospitals, and Federal and State agencies, including Army, Navy, and Air Force installations, have collaborated since 1948 in reporting the occurrence of specifically diagnosed influenza as a part of the World Health Organization Influenza Study Program in the United States. These communications are summarized weekly in the Communicable Disease Summary of the National Office of Vital Statistics, Public Health Service, and are also distributed to health officials and interested research workers in the United States and other countries, and to the headquarters of the World Health Organization in Geneva. The program, operating on a worldwide basis, also facilitates the exchange of newly isolated strains of influenza virus for study purposes.

During the period covered by this report, July 1, 1953, to June 30, 1954, the incidence of influenza in the United States was the lowest in 4 years. It was characterized by the absence of outbreaks caused by influenza A virus although infections with influenza B and influenza C were recorded.

The failure to identify epidemic influenza A occurred in spite of extended epidemiological and laboratory studies by the military services

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and the Public Health Service, and in spite of close surveillance by State health departments and the Epidemic Intelligence Service of the Communicable Disease Center, Public Health Service. During almost every month of the winter season, Army area laboratories reported a few instances of a significant increase in titer of serum antibodies against influenza A in the hemagglutination inhibition tests. However, no report of the isolation of influenza A virus in the United States was received at the WHO Influenza Information Center.

Influenza B was diagnosed serologically in a number of high school students in Santa Clara County, Calif., who had respiratory illnesses in the middle and latter part of January. In February, March, and April, localized outbreaks of influenza B were identified in other parts of California. In late March and early April, a minor outbreak of influenza B occurred at a naval installation in Illinois. Strains of virus were recovered which appeared to differ from the Lee strain. Influenza B was also serologically confirmed in localized areas of Minnesota during March and April.

Influenza C virus was recovered first in December 1953 at a naval installation in Illinois, and then sporadically during the remainder of the winter. It was also isolated from 4 members of 1 family and from 2 other individuals in Norfolk, who had a respiratory illness in April.

The mortality experience during the winter season gave no evidence of any increase as a result of influenza, as, according to the National Office of Vital Statistics, is usually the case when an epidemic is prevalent.

In other parts of the Western Hemisphere, influenza A was identified in 2 small outbreaks in Puerto Rico in March, and 2 isolated strains were found to be similar but not identical to A/FW/1/50 and A/FLW/1/52.

In South Africa, during late May and June 1954, there was a sharp outbreak of influenza. Recovered strains examined at the World Health Influenza Center in London proved to be influenza A similar to the Liverpool strain A/England/1/51. In Australia, influenza A was also prevalent during the same period.