



Drinking Water

History of Drinking Water Treatment

A Century of U.S. Water Chlorination and Treatment: One of the Ten Greatest Public Health Achievements of the 20th Century

American drinking water supplies are among the safest in the world. The disinfection of water has played a critical role in improving drinking water quality in the United States. In 1908, Jersey City, New Jersey was the first city in the United States to begin routine disinfection of community drinking water. Over the next decade, thousands of cities and towns across the United States followed suit in routinely disinfecting their drinking water, contributing to a dramatic decrease in disease across the country (Fig 1).

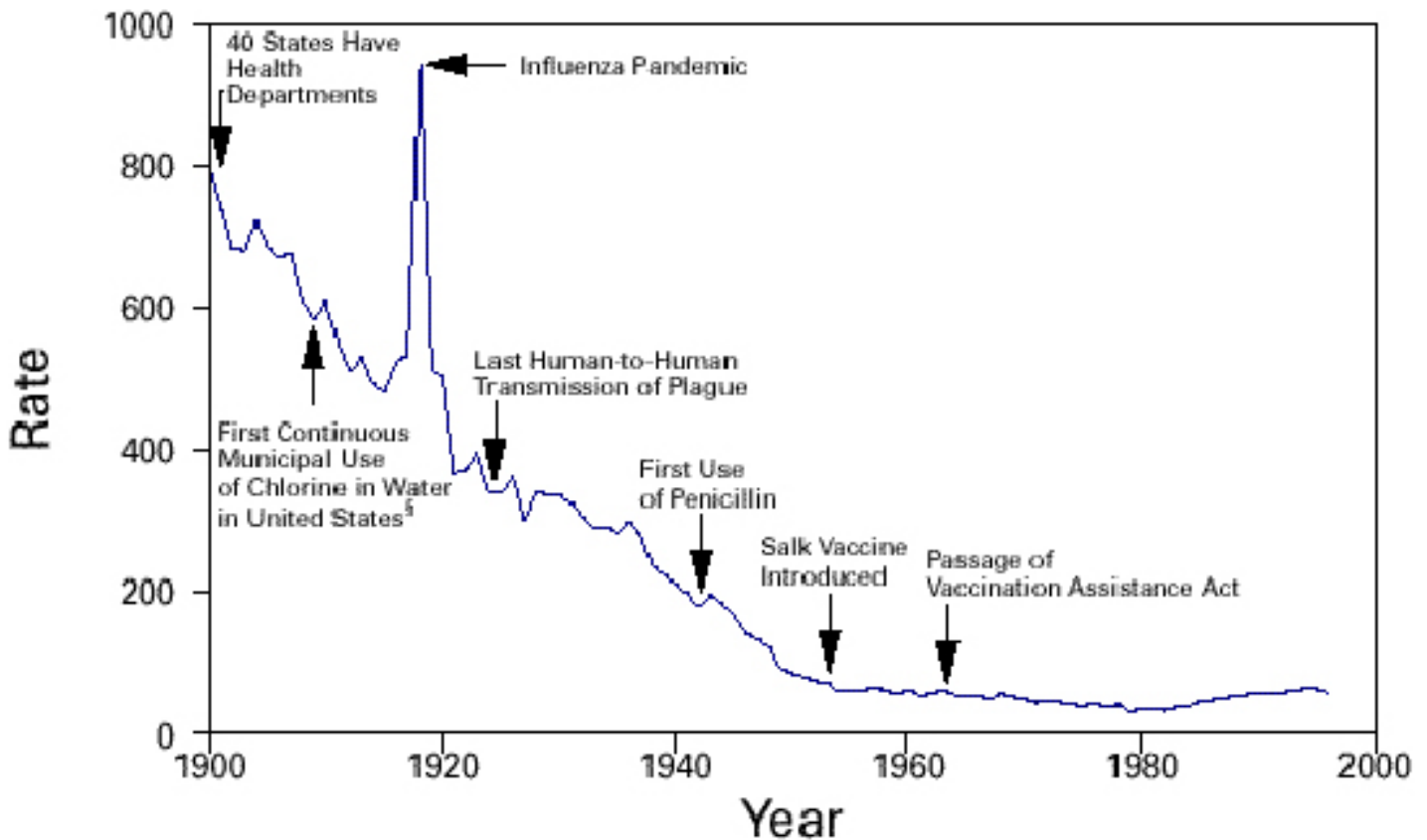


Figure 1. Crude death rate* for infectious diseases - United States, 1900-1996

*Per 100,000 population per year.

The occurrence of diseases such as [cholera](#) and [typhoid](#) dropped dramatically. In 1900, the occurrence of typhoid fever in the United States was approximately 100 cases per 100,000 people. By 1920, it had decreased to 33.8 cases per 100,000 people. In 2006, it had decreased to 0.1 cases per 100,000 people (only 353 cases) with approximately 75% occurring among international travelers. Typhoid fever decreased rapidly in cities from Baltimore to Chicago as water disinfection and treatment was instituted. This decrease in illness is credited to the implementation of drinking water disinfection and treatment, improving the quality of source water, and improvements in sanitation and hygiene.

It is because of these successes that we can celebrate over a century of public drinking water disinfection and treatment – one of the greatest public health achievements of the 20th century.

CDC. [A Century of U.S. Water Chlorination and Treatment: One of the Ten Greatest Public Health Achievements of the 20th Century](#). Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 1999;48(29):621-9.



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