

# Scientists explore 1510 influenza pandemic and lessons learned

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History's first recognized influenza pandemic originated in Asia and rapidly spread to other continents 500 years ago, in the summer of 1510. A new commentary by researchers at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health, explores the 1510 pandemic and what we have learned since then about preventing, controlling and treating influenza.

Prior to that time, regional and local epidemics of respiratory [infectious diseases](#) and pneumonia had occurred, but no outbreaks had yet been recorded on a worldwide scale. The 1510 pandemic first arose in Asia, but it spread quickly to [Africa](#) and Europe via trade routes. Although the disease—which was then referred to by various descriptive terms such as "gasping oppression"—was highly infectious, the death rate was low, and the pandemic ended quickly.

The authors concede that the emergence of new pandemic influenza viruses remains as unpredictable as it was 500 years ago. But they outline a host of scientific and public health advances that have taken place since then—from the study of microbiology to the development of vaccines and treatment—that now allow us to better plan and prepare for both seasonal and [pandemic](#) influenza. For example, scientists at NIAID and elsewhere are currently researching the possibility of a universal [influenza](#) vaccine, which would aim to protect individuals from all strains of flu.

**More information:** DM Morens et al. Pandemic influenza's 500th

anniversary ([dx.doi.org/10.1086/657429](https://doi.org/10.1086/657429)). *Clinical Infectious Diseases*. DOI:10.1086/657429 (2010).

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