

Unit 5: The Flu Virus

Narrator: Every year, many people get sick from a virus we call influenza or the flu. But just what is the flu? And why do so many people get it?

The influenza virus can be very dangerous. It kills more than 36,000 people in America every year. And has killed thousands more across history. The flu virus is so dangerous because it is hard to cure. And it is hard to cure because it is always changing.

Since just 2004, more than 5,000 different flu viruses have been identified. The types that hurt humans are called types A, B, and C. But it is type A that can spread from one person to another the fastest. Type A flu can also spread from different types of animals to humans. For example, avian flu starts in birds, and swine flu starts in pigs but both can spread quickly to humans.

Between 1918 and 1919, a deadly type A flu virus called the Spanish flu spread all over the world. It made a third of the people on Earth sick, and killed up to 50 million people. Scientists think this flu virus came from birds. And in 2009, a type of swine flu caused 375,000 people to be sick.

Today, scientists are working to identify new types of flu and trying to make new medicines to keep people safe.