



5 reasons why pandemics will be more frequent

We must prepare now for future outbreaks.

By Leah Curtin, RN, ScD(h), FAAN

IN 1918, nurses played a pivotal role in the Spanish flu pandemic that killed about 675,000 Americans and up to 50 million people worldwide. In the 1 year that the Spanish flu ravaged the globe, nurses worked tirelessly to care for sick and dying patients, at the same time exposing themselves and their families to the virus. They're doing the same today.



Today's situation is similar to 1918, but we are doing more to help COVID-19's victims. In fact, nurses are playing increasingly more important roles today, and the American Nurses' Association is calling for local and state officials to better protect staff nurses who are working directly with sick patients. Registered nurses and other providers on the frontline of our healthcare system are the first responders as COVID-19 moves through our communities. We must make sure protocols, protections, and

rapid communication with exposed caregivers are in place.

In addition, these modern developments have put the world at higher risk of more pandemics.

1. **Global transportation:** The ability to traverse the globe in about 2 days increases the risk of quickly bringing a deadly virus from a remote part of the world to populated cities.
2. **Urbanization:** The clustering of large populations in metropolitan areas helps viruses spread quickly.
3. **Human encroachment:** The occurrence of zoonotic diseases (like Ebola) increases as humans continue to encroach on wildlife habitats.
4. **Climate change:** Changing climates across the globe are expanding the reach of vectors, such as mosquitos, into new regions.
5. **Social media:** Falsehoods and misinformation spread via social media are expanding the anti-vaccination movement, which puts the youngest and most vulnerable at risk.

Because pandemic outbreaks are both predictable (they will occur) and unpredictable (we don't know where or when), global health agencies must develop plans that will provide appropriate and timely responses.

Although nurses are caring for critically ill and infectious patients, no systematic review exists to explore nurses' experiences as they work during these challenging times. Nurses report experiencing stress and anxiety during pandemics, so we must prepare to provide both physical and mental safety for our colleagues who respond to the needs of others.

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