

## Retroplis

# 250,000 lives lost: How the pandemic compares to other deadly events in U.S. history

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At least 250,000 people in the United States have died of covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, since February, and many public health officials warn the pandemic is just entering its deadliest phase. Yet, as the country confronts this horrifying death toll, there is little understanding of what a loss of this size represents.

Here is some historical perspective about losing a quarter of a million people, looking at major events in our past that have cost American lives.

America's 250,000 covid deaths: People die, but little changes

More than 58,000 Americans were killed during the decade-plus of involvement in the Vietnam War. So the pandemic's fatalities represent four Vietnam Wars since February.

During the Korean War, nearly 37,000 Americans were lost; covid-19 has claimed nearly seven times more.

During World War II, the country mourned 405,000 members of the "Greatest Generation." The pandemic has taken nearly two-thirds as many people, a lot of them old enough to remember the fight against the Nazis and the Japanese.

And World War I? 116,000 U.S. dead in two years of fighting. The pandemic has more than doubled that number in a fraction of the time.

What about our deadliest conflict, the Civil War? Death toll estimates range from 600,000 to 850,000. Even at the high end of that range, the pandemic has permanently taken nearly 30 percent as many family members from Thanksgiving tables.

On Sept. 11, 2001, almost 3,000 people were killed in terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and Shanksville, Pa.

The deadliest day of the pandemic so far — Sept. 18 — surpassed that, at 3,660 deaths. Wednesday, as the virus surged across the country, the daily death toll had risen again to 1,894. Public health officials fear that by the end of this month, the United States could lose more people per day from the pandemic than the 2,403 Americans killed in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

And how does this pandemic compare to others in U.S. history?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention keeps records on four of them. The 2009 H1N1 pandemic killed 12,469 Americans. The 1968 Influenza A pandemic killed about 100,000 people. And the 1957-1958 Influenza A pandemic took 116,000 U.S. lives.

The deadliest event in U.S. history was the 1918 flu pandemic, which is estimated to have killed 675,000 Americans.

One of the more conservative disease models currently projects the United States could reach 438,000 deaths, more than during World War II, by March 1, 2021.

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