

# History of Past Pandemics in Switzerland

Group 5

# Table of contents

01

Goal/Personas

02

Website

03

Visualizations

04

Conclusion

# A Conversation at a Garden Party...

## General Public



**Name:** Anna Keller

**Age:** 34

**Location:** Bern, Switzerland

**Occupation:** Communications Specialist

**Education Level:** Bachelor's degree in Communication

**Digital Literacy:** Average (familiar with digital tools, websites, interactive content)

**Knowledge of Epidemiology/History:** Basic

Image 1: Portrait of a young woman

## Researchers



**Name:** Dr. Markus Frei

**Age:** 47

**Location:** Zurich, Switzerland

**Occupation:** Epidemiologist and Associate Professor

**Education Level:** PhD in Public Health

**Digital Literacy:** Very High (uses data analysis tools, academic platforms)

**Knowledge of Epidemiology/History:** Advanced

Image 2: Portrait of a middle-aged man

# Meeting Anna's Curiosity with Clear Answers

## Topic

She's curious about:

- How severe were past pandemics in Switzerland — and how does COVID-19 compare?
- How have pandemic-related deaths and causes of death changed over time?
- What patterns from past pandemics can help us prepare for the future?

## Goal:

**To create a data story that answers exactly these questions – visually, clearly, and with historical context.**

# First Glimpse: Anna on the Website

- Clear, welcoming title:  
**“Lessons from the Past – Visualizing Switzerland’s Pandemic History”**
- Simple layout, intuitive navigation  
→ 3 sections: *History, Influenza in Switzerland, Causes of Death*
- Short intro explains the purpose in plain language
- Interactive charts are embedded right into the story  
→ no extra clicks, no tech knowledge needed

## In her mind:

- “This feels easy to explore — and actually interesting!”

## Data & Visualizations

This dashboard is based on static historical data from the Swiss National Science Foundation project "Bridging the Gap", hosted on [leaddata.ch](https://leaddata.ch).

We use three core datasets:

- Dataset 1: Pandemic history (COVID, Influenza, excess mortality)
- Dataset 2: Canton-level details from the 1950s (cases, deaths, population)
- Dataset 3: Causes of death in Switzerland from 1876–2002



## 1 Historical Overview

### 1.1 Pandemic Death Rates

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted life across the globe. In Switzerland, as in many countries, society paused, reeled, and eventually adapted. As the emergency fades, a question lingers: **Have we really learned from this crisis or are we doomed to forget, again?** This project invites you on a journey. A journey through 130 years of Swiss pandemic history, told through data: deaths, diseases, and resilience. We visualize key insights from historical records to better understand how pandemics shaped our past—and how they can guide our future.

#### How Deadly Were Past Pandemics?

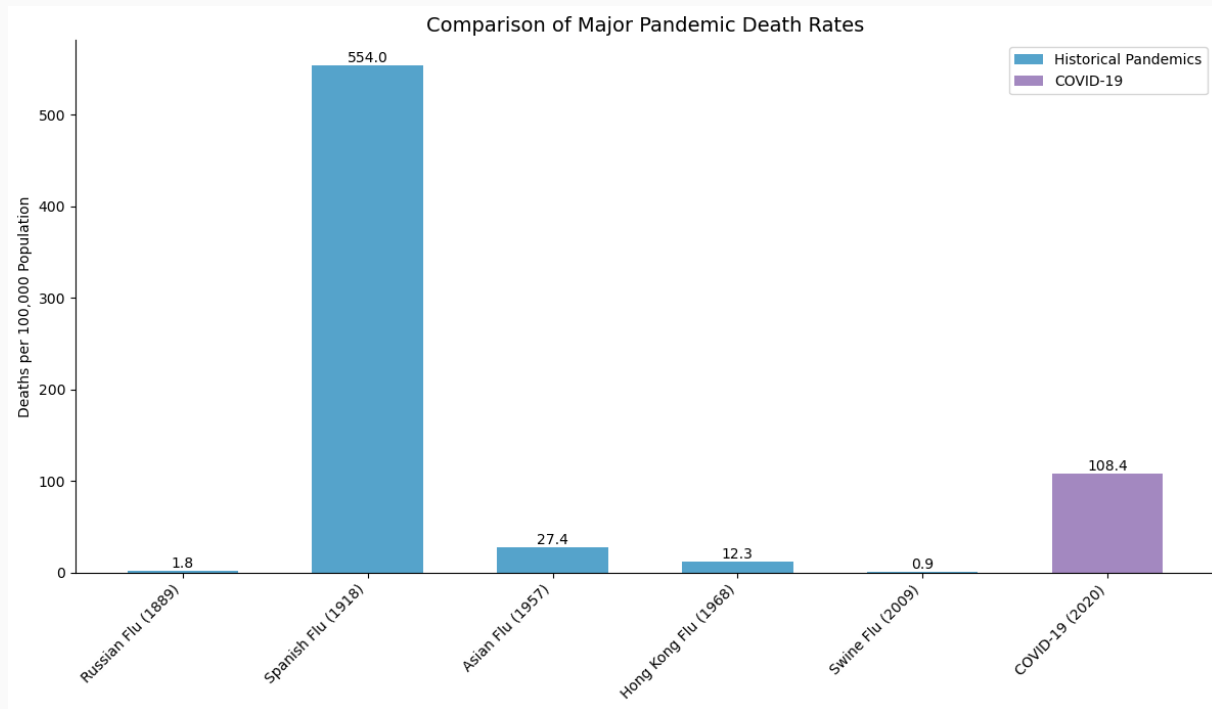
When people think of pandemics, COVID-19 is top of mind. But how does it compare to earlier pandemics? To answer this, we looked at death rates from major pandemics in Switzerland from 1889 to 2020, measured per 100,000 people. The bar chart below reveals the toll of each crisis:



# Historic Pandemic Deaths

In her mind:

- "I had no idea it was this deadly,"
- "It's really useful to see how the current situation compares to previous ones,"

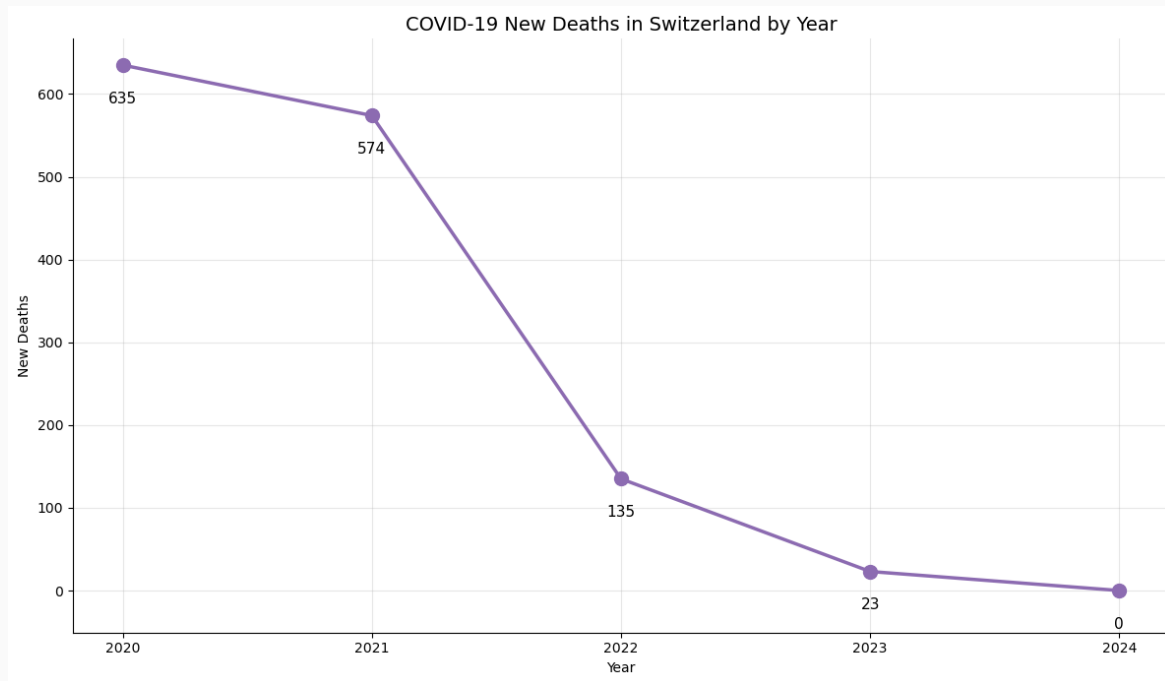




# Influenza and COVID-19: Deaths Over Time

In her mind:

- "Wow, that's much less than I expected,"
- "These charts help me to understand what felt so overwhelming at the time."

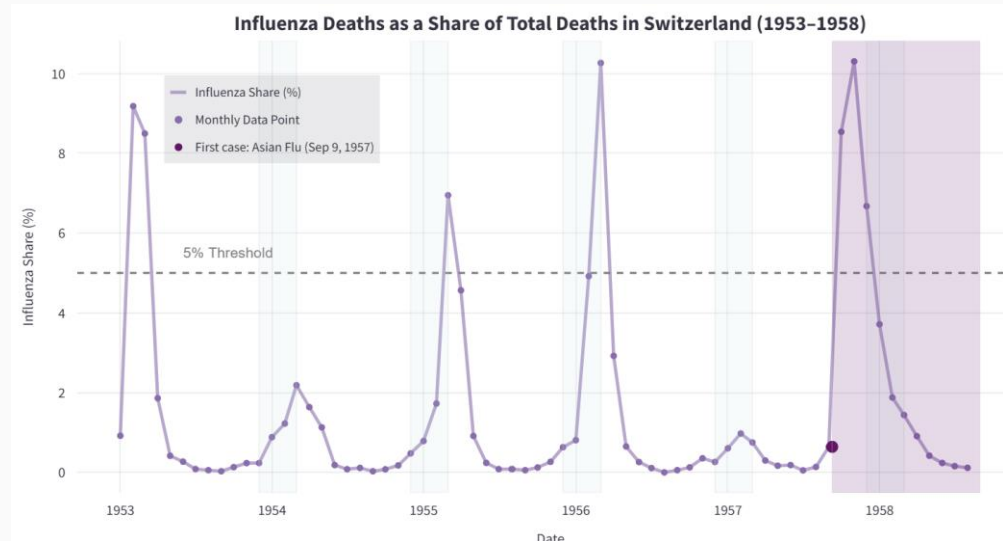




# Influenza Deaths as a Share of Total Deaths in Switzerland (1953–1958)

In her mind:

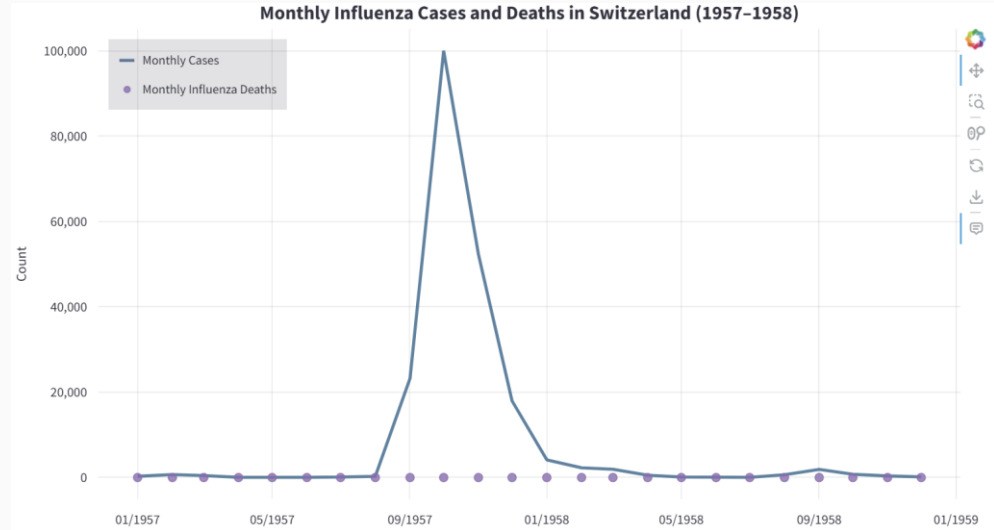
- “So flu was behind more than 1 in 10 deaths that month?”
- "Now I understand why older people are warned every winter..."



# Monthly Influenza Cases and Deaths in Switzerland (1957–1958)

In her mind:

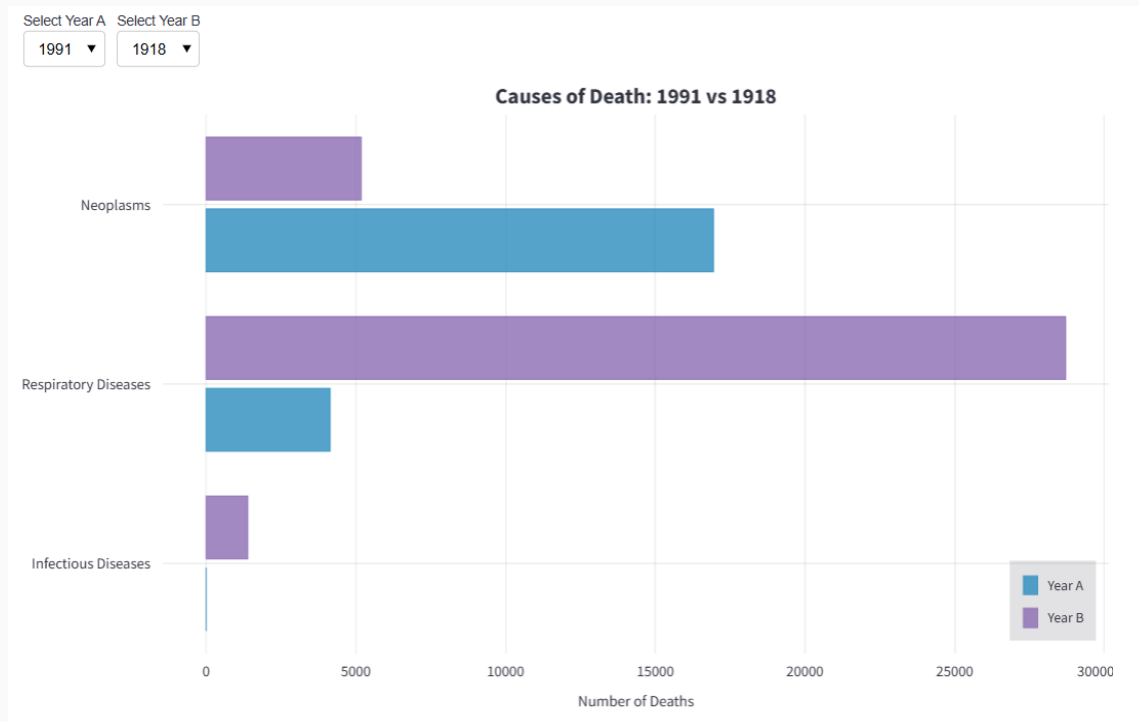
- “That spike is huge... why didn’t more people die?”
- "So outbreaks aren't all the same... it's not just about the numbers."



# Compare Causes of Death Over Time

In her Mind:

- “Wow, look at cancer - it's way higher now. But infectious diseases almost disappeared,”
- "I can look into this myself. It's not just information - it's a tool I can use."



# Who Is the Real Hero?

The real hero is: *the Swiss Society*.

Our story shows how **Switzerland** as a society has faced pandemics repeatedly and how:

- **People adapted** (vaccines, hygiene, medicine)
- **Health systems evolved**
- **Data and knowledge grew**

By visualizing these shifts, we highlight not just the past, but the power of **learning from it**.

The true hero is society's ability to learn, prepare, and protect each other together.

# Conclusion

- The simple design and clear structure made it easy for her to dive in.
- Interactive charts helped her explore *her own questions, not just read preset answers*.
- The storytelling, through time and visuals, helped turn confusing numbers into something meaningful.
- She came to realize that pandemics aren't just medical events; they're societal challenges society has faced.

*In the end, Anna discovered that society's real strength lies in how we learn, adapt, and care for one another.*

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# Sources

## Data:

Data sets provided by the project leaders:

- Kaspar Staub (UZH)
- Wibke Weber (ZHAW)
- Website of the project: [www.leaddata.ch](http://www.leaddata.ch)

## Pictures:

- Image 1: OpenAI. “Portrait of a young woman”. *Image generated using DALL·E through ChatGPT.* 2025. <https://chat.openai.com/>.
- Image 2: OpenAI. “Portrait of a middle-aged man”. *Image generated using DALL·E through ChatGPT.* 2025. <https://chat.openai.com/>.



★ Thank you for listening ★