
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Covid: One year on

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Georgina

And I'm Georgina.

Neil

In this programme we're talking about something the whole world knows about – coronavirus.

Georgina

Sadly, Covid-19 has been responsible for more than two million deaths globally.

Neil

What's believed to have started in the city of Wuhan in China went on to become a **pandemic** – a disease that affects many people around the world.

Georgina

Unsurprisingly, we've discussed this a lot on 6 Minute English but over a year on since the first outbreak, it's good to take stock – or look back over the situation and see what we have learnt - and find out how our knowledge has changed.

Neil

Before we do that, Georgina, let's test your knowledge with a question. In 1918/1919 another major virus known as Spanish flu, swept across the world. Do you know approximately, how many people were infected by it? Was it...

- a) 5 million
- b) 50 million, or
- c) 500 million?

Georgina

Well, I know it was bad, so I'm going for the awful number of 500 million.

Neil

OK, I'll reveal the right answer later on. Now, back to the current coronavirus pandemic. It was only at the end of December 2019 when reports of a new flu-like infection first came out of China. Within weeks, millions of people were in lockdown as the virus **took hold** around the world.

Georgina

Took hold means it became stronger and was difficult to stop. We all had to change the way we lived to stop it spreading. But while we played our part by washing our hands, wearing masks and staying at home, some people were busy working for a solution to fight this deadly virus.

Neil

You're talking about the scientists, Georgina. Their response was immediate and it's something the BBC World Service programme Science in Action has been reflecting on.

Georgina

At the beginning of the outbreak, Jenny Rohn, a virologist from University College London, spoke to the programme about her concerns if the virus turned out to be like flu. Here's what she said...

Jenny Rohn, virologist, University College London

Seasonal flu is a huge killer and you've probably seen the numbers, it makes the Wuhan virus look a bit **wimpy**, that's simply because of the **sheer** number of people that flu infects every year. And if the Wuhan virus started spreading like that and going all over the world, you would see a lot of people dead. This is why people are worried.

Neil

So we know flu is a virus that can spread easily and can affect many many people. This is why, at the time, comparing it with the new coronavirus made Covid look '**wimpy**' – that's a word to describe something or someone that's feeble - not very strong.

Georgina

Yes, Jenny called the great or significant numbers of people affected by flu as **sheer numbers**. The fear at the time was if coronavirus spread like flu, it would kill many people.

Neil

Well, we all know what happened next – it did spread. But, working behind the scenes, scientists developed tests we could use to see if we were infected.

Georgina

But the main challenge was to develop a vaccine that could stop us becoming infected altogether. This involved people around the world working together to share information.

Neil

This work started straight away and Dr Peter Dazak, Zoologist and President of EcoHealth Alliance, told the Science in Action programme that this initial response in China helped with the development of a vaccine...

Dr Peter Dazak, Zoologist and President of EcoHealth Alliance

Despite what everyone says, you know, they had a system to find unusual pneumonia cases. We now think that that system **kicked in**, maybe not on the first actual case of Covid, but certainly within a couple of months of the first case, it seems. So that's quite quick. And then from that point, to actually getting a full **genome**, genetic sequence of the virus, was very quick – and getting that published and publically available – and then rapidly developing diagnostic tests and vaccines now – that's really worked well.

Neil

So China had a scientific system which **kicked in** – or started happening – quite quickly. Within a few months of the first coronavirus outbreak, experts began to work out the full **genome** of the virus – that's the full amount of genetic information of something.

Georgina

This genetic information was made publically available and helped towards the development of various vaccines that we see now – which is hopefully our way out of this pandemic.

Neil

Let's hope so, Georgina. The science is amazing and is explained in more detail in the BBC's Science in Action programme. But now let's get back to our quiz question. Earlier I asked you how many people were infected by Spanish flu back in 1918/1919?

Georgina

I guessed 500 million. Was I right?

Neil

You were, Georgina. An incredible 500 million people around the world were infected by the Spanish flu virus and over 50 million people died worldwide.

Georgina

Well, the death toll from coronavirus hasn't been that bad, but is still a significant number.

Neil

OK, well we've just time to recap some of the vocabulary we've discussed today. Starting with **pandemic** – a disease that affects many people around the world.

Georgina

When something **took hold**, it means it became stronger and was difficult to stop.

Neil

The word **wimpy** describes something or someone that's feeble or not very strong.

Georgina

Something that is **sheer** is great or significant – so **sheer numbers** means a great amount of something.

Neil

When something **kicks in** it starts to happen.

Georgina

And a **genome** is the full amount of genetic information of something.

Neil

Well, we're out of time but there's lots more 6 Minute English programmes to enjoy on our website at bbclearningenglish.com.

Georgina

And if you like topical discussions and want to learn how to use the vocabulary found in headlines, why not try out our News Review podcast? You'll find programmes specifically about Covid-19 and lots of other interesting topics. Remember we also have an app that you can download for free from the app stores. And of course, we are on most social media platforms.

Neil

Thanks for listening and goodbye.

Georgina

Goodbye.

VOCABULARY

pandemic

disease that affects many people around the world

take hold

become stronger and is difficult to stop

wimpy

feeble or not very strong

sheer

great or significant

kicks in

starts to happen

genome

the full amount of genetic information of something