

Covid-19: A History
by Jacalyn Duffin

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Jacalyn Duffin is an eminent Canadian haematologist and medical historian. This book is one of the increasing number devoted to Covid-19. It has a good selection of useful Tables and Figures, a comprehensive Index and extensive Reference List, sensibly accessed via a digital link. The style is flowing and easy to read and the book does not assume any great knowledge of history or medicine.

So much happened during the Covid era and it changed so rapidly that talk of the 'first wave' seems like a lifetime ago. It is useful to put things in chronological perspective as the narrative progresses. Worldwide reactions and responses during the first wave are given, perhaps naturally, with slight emphasis on Canada. The public health response, politics and consequences like panic buying and shortages are also discussed.

The next parts discuss concepts of Infection in history, pandemics, discovery of microbes and the link between infection and living conditions. This continues to development of testing for Covid-19 and how this aided global and regional pandemic-tracking and provided a framework for what was allowed or forbidden, such as travel or school attendance. Control measures and their controversies are then described. The financial impacts of the pandemic and these measures are included.

There is much information on treatments and the related debates, including hydroxychloroquine, vitamin D and antibodies. Vaccines are similarly discussed, although, rightly, the author points out that when written in early 2022, vaccines were still evolving. The unprecedented speed of vaccine development resulted in cooperation across accepted boundaries but also led to vaccine nationalism.

Statistics and the second wave are presented with many figures. A global perspective is maintained. The consequences of lockdown including social stresses, political turmoil and economic strain are described. Vaccine hesitancy is addressed. Finally, the origins of the pandemic are discussed with all the uncertainty that still reigns.

It is early to be writing a definitive 'history' of Covid-19 and further editions will be needed to maintain reader interest. The pandemic is not over and the situation is still evolving rapidly. More information will surface on the virus, politics, response and scandals. However, this book is readable and well researched and should appeal to a wide audience, including the informed general reader.

William Dobb
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