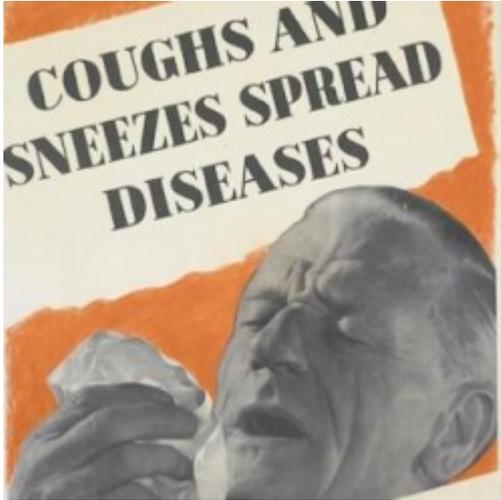


# Groundhog Says Six More Weeks of Flu Season



By Alex Berezow — February 1, 2018



Credit: Public Domain/Wikipedia [1]

Groundhog Day, the greatest American tradition, happens every year on February 2nd, when several overly dressed gents pull a rodent out of a tree to predict the weather for the next six weeks. They've done this for 132 years.

Let that sink in. In the words of Louisiana Senator John Kennedy, "That's why the aliens won't talk to us."

Besides being a little strange, the Groundhog Day prediction isn't accurate. Well [over 100 times](#) [2], Phil saw his shadow and predicted more winter. His prognostications have provided little insight on what is to come in the following weeks, but at least Phil has confirmed that it's always sunny in Punxsutawney.

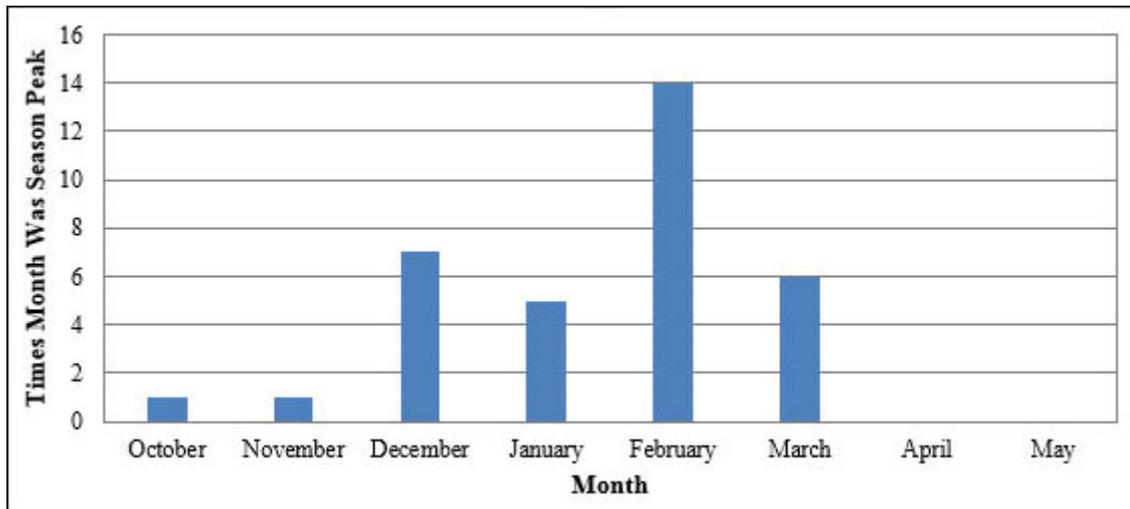
If the little woodchuck\* wants to improve his accuracy, perhaps he should consider switching from meteorology to epidemiology. Phil, how long will the flu season last?

## **Groundhog Day: Phil Says Six More Weeks of Flu Season**

This year's flu season is very bad. As my colleague and fellow microbiologist Dr. Julianna LeMieux [explains](#) [3], flu seasons that are led primarily by H3N2 viruses are unusually nasty. The CDC [estimates](#) [4] that each year from 2010, influenza has killed 12,000 to 56,000 Americans. This season's flu is likely to be at the higher end of that range.

The reason is because, as my colleague Dr. Josh Bloom [writes](#) [5], some strains of the flu can kill a person in at least two different ways. One way is by making a person susceptible to secondary bacterial infections, which can lead to pneumonia. The other way is by triggering an overwhelming immune response, known as a "[cytokine storm](#) [6]," that is often fatal.

When will this year's flu season come to an end? That's where Phil could come in handy. Since he usually predicts six more weeks of winter, he should instead predict six more weeks of flu season. Then, he might be more useful. According to the CDC, February is the month that flu season usually peaks in the United States.



[Source](#) [7]: CDC

In fact, of the last 34 flu seasons, 20 peaked in February or March. The little tree rat could hardly go wrong.

So go get vaccinated and perhaps stock up on [Tamiflu](#) [8]. But don't count on either of those to work miracles. Until scientists develop a universal vaccine, we'll be dealing with influenza for the foreseeable future.

*\*Note: Yes, groundhogs are also known as woodchucks. So the answer to the timeless question, "How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?" is, "Ask Phil."*

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**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/02/01/groundhog-says-six-more-weeks-flu-season-12514>

#### Links

[1]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneeze#/media/File:Coughs\\_and\\_Sneezes\\_Spread\\_Diseases\\_Art.IWMPST14133.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneeze#/media/File:Coughs_and_Sneezes_Spread_Diseases_Art.IWMPST14133.jpg)

[2] <https://www.livescience.com/32974-punxsutawney-phil-weather-prediction-accuracy.html>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/01/02/some-bad-flu-news-h3n2-major-player-year-12350>

[4] <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/2015-16.htm>

[5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/01/29/years-flu-different-it-kills-two-ways-12483>

[6] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cytokine\\_storm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cytokine_storm)

[7] <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season.htm>

[8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/01/10/its-flu-season-hell-should-we-take-tamiflu-12388>