**Martin Bayly on the Influenza Virus and Treatments in 1918**

At this time medical science - the science that we use to understand diseases - wasn't very well developed and some of the things that they thought about this disease were actually wrong. At time of the pandemic there were lots of discoveries of different types of bacteria, which helped cure a lot of diseases, including smallpox. A bacteria is different from a virus, it functions differently. It attacks the body in different ways. People mistakenly thought that the Spanish flu was another type of bacteria and it could be treated with things like antibiotics when in fact what was needed was a vaccine that would attack the virus.

The doctors thought they knew how influenza spread. They thought because it was a bacterium that if houses were clean and if streets were clean, then that would help prevent it spread. But as we know, a virus spreads through coughing through droplets in the air or contact. The health messages that they sent out were not very helpful.

And some of the health messages were quite strange. They included things like gargling - that means holding a little bit of water with salt and some chemicals at the back of your throat. They thought that if you cleaned your throat like that, it would help you get better because they thought influenza was a bacterium. Something that we needed to just clean out of our body, but these treatments would not work. In fact, some people thought that it would help if adults drunk whiskey, for example, and other types of alcohol.

The fact that the ‘Spanish Flu’ was a virus meant that it needed a vaccine to help us make the right antibodies to fight the virus. Antibodies are tiny cells that fight viruses in our bodies. We have 10 billion inside us!

Questions:

1. Why were the doctors wrong about the Spanish Flu?
2. What health messages were given out?
3. Why were these not helpful?
4. What was the Spanish Flu and what did it need to stop it?
5. Can you think of any other diseases we have vaccines for?