

# Causes of Death in Yolo County

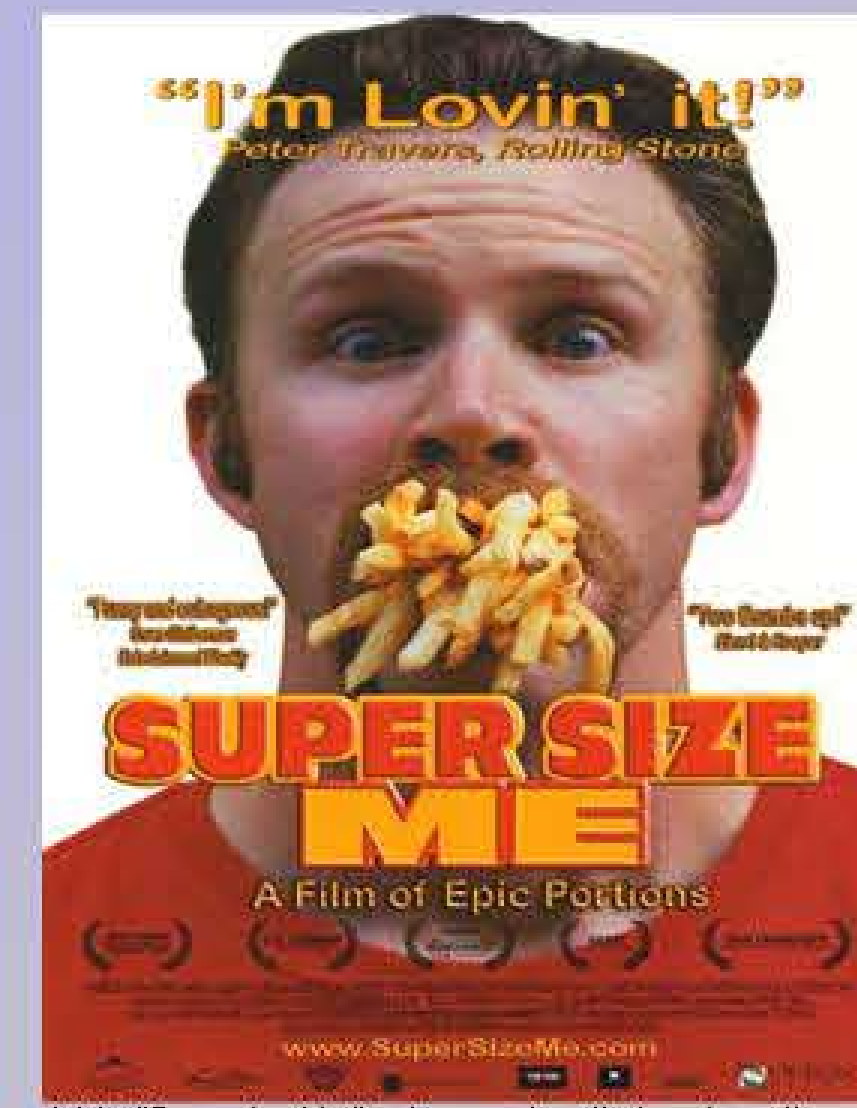
## THEN (1905)...

## and NOW...

In the early 1900s, infectious diseases were common killers. In Yolo County and in the rest of the nation, Tuberculosis ("TB") was the leading cause of death followed by Influenza/Pneumonia. Typhoid Fever, Malaria, Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever and Smallpox were not uncommon diseases in Yolo County a century ago. The average age at death was 49 years.

Advances in science and medicine led to Public Health prevention programs that greatly reduced infectious diseases as a cause of death. Vaccination programs, isolation and quarantine, food safety, mosquito control, drinking water treatment and sanitation are all examples of ongoing Public Health prevention practices that protect communities from infectious disease. Disease prevention and surveillance for emerging infectious diseases (e.g., West Nile Virus, SARS, HIV, Avian Flu) continues to be core function of Public Health.

### #1 Tuberculosis



Ad for "Super Size Me," a documentary that explores the impact of a fast food diet on health, 2004.

### #1 Heart Disease

Yolo County has met the national goal for reducing the Heart Disease death rate by the year 2010. However, as of 2005 death rates for Cancer, Accidents and Stroke have not yet met national goals.

Compared to the rest of the State, Yolo County experienced a significantly lower death rate due to Heart Disease. Death rates due to Cancer, Stroke, Diabetes, Accidents, Firearm Injuries, Homicide and Suicide are comparable to State rates.

(Source: County Health Status Profiles 2005, California Department of Health Services & OCLHO.)

### #2 Influenza/Pneumonia

### #2 Cancer

"Typhoid fever... was so prevalent that if a period came when a doctor did not have under his care at least one or two patients so afflicted, his confreres were apt to suspect either that his popularity was waning in the community or that his diagnostic acumen was not all that it might be..."

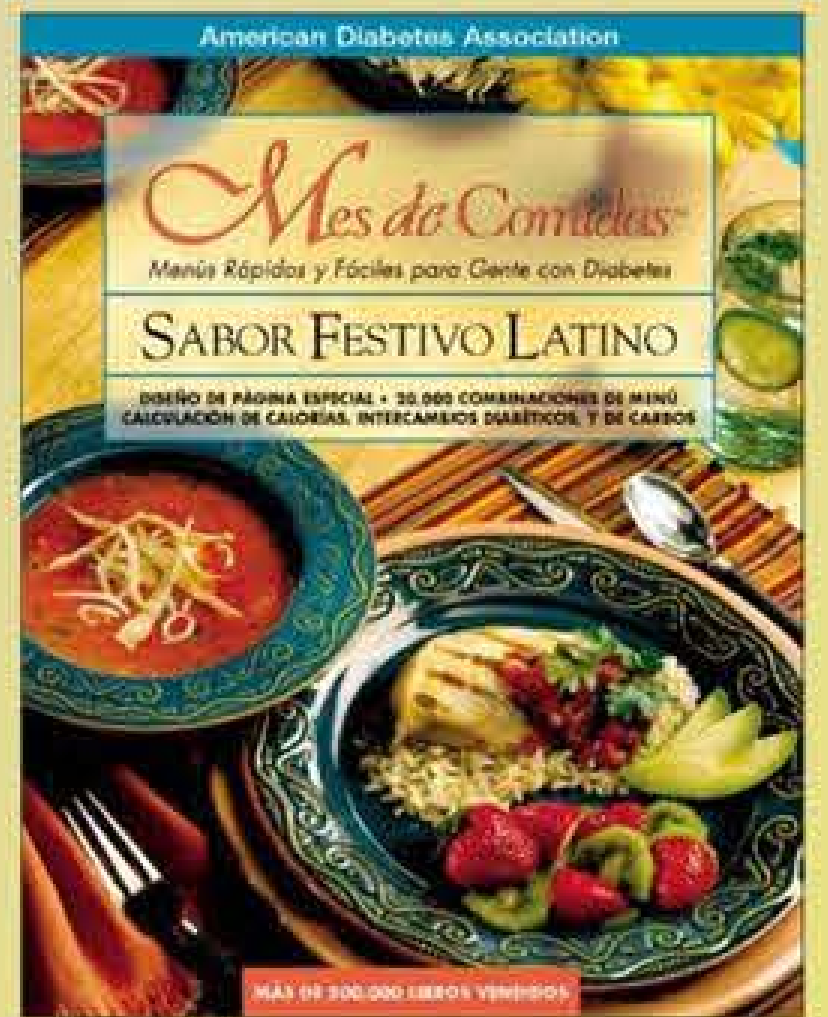
- Fred H. Fairchild, M.D., Yolo County physician, *A History of the Woodland Clinic*, 1952.

### #3 Heart Disease

### #3 Stroke

### #4 Cancer

### #4 Emphysema



Mes de Comida: Sabor Festivo Latino diabetic diet cookbook, American Diabetes Association, 2003.

### #5 Accidents

### #5 Influenza/Pneumonia



"Mary Frances Gathier (1865-1938), Capay Valley nurse and midwife, circa 1900." Mary Gathier founded the first nursing home in Esparto which later specialized in treating Tuberculosis patients. Photo courtesy, the Yolo County Archives. (L3-25)

### #6 Stroke

"Typhoid Fever is prevailing in several localities of the County and there are two cases in the hospital. Scarlet Fever has been reported and Diphtheria is not entirely eradicated. [The] County Board of Health is to meet Monday Sept. 4<sup>th</sup> to consider best means of combating [sic] these dread diseases..."

- D. Lawhead, M.D., Health Officer, Monthly Report of the Yolo County Hospital, August 1905.

### #7 Diarrheal Illnesses

### #6 Accidents

### #8 Prematurity

### #7 Diabetes

"In 1973, when I was a young doctor, in the pediatric/diabetic clinic, we never saw a child with type 2 diabetes. Now it's about a third of the pediatric/diabetic population. At the rate we are going a third of today's babies will be diabetic by the time they are age 40, with an average reduction in life span of about 15 years, and average reduction in the quality of life of about 20 years. This is a hugely threatening and important epidemic that we are facing."

- Richard Jackson, M.D., M.P.H., State Public Health Officer, California Department of Health Services, speaking on obesity in 2004.

### #9 Typhoid Fever

### #8 Alzheimer's Disease

### #10 Kidney Disease

### #9 Chronic Liver Disease

In 1905, the most common cause of Accidental death in Yolo County involved trains - either being hit by a train or falling off a train. Drowning was the second leading cause of Accidental death. One hundred years later, Motor Vehicle Accidents are the most common cause of Accidental death in Yolo County. Motor Vehicle death rates have declined significantly over the past ten years in Yolo County.

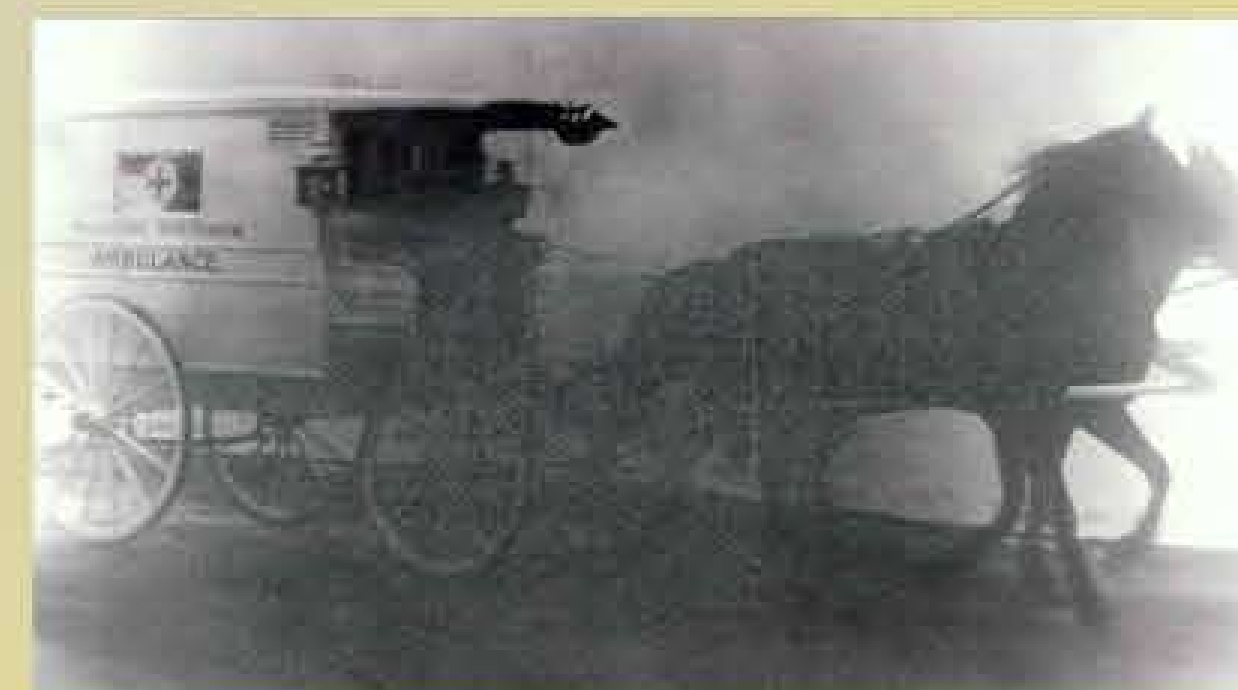
(Source: Yolo County Health Department.)



Illustration from *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a well-known children's book involving scarlet fever.

"How about his old bunny?" she asked. "That?" said the doctor. "Why, it's a mass of scarlet fever germs - Burn it at once."

- From *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Margery Williams, 1922.



"Woodland Sanitarium ambulance in action, circa 1910." Photo courtesy, Yolo County Archives. (#0V D-3)



Before a vaccine became available, doctors in Yolo County used diptheria antitoxin to treat patients. (photo from *Plagues and Politics*, Fitzhugh Mullan, M.D., 1989.)



"Woodland Grammar School teacher Lulu Shelton and her students, circa 1905." These children grew up in a time when death due to Tuberculosis, Influenza, Typhoid Fever, Diphtheria and other infectious diseases was common. Photo courtesy, the Yolo County Archives. (E13-10)

"The year just closed has been quite eventful in many respects. Some unprecedented features have arisen which, with the marked increase in number and dissemination of infectious diseases, calls for more comprehensive provisions to meet the increased quarantine and sanitary demands. Smallpox has prevailed in nearly every section of the County - in fact, has been almost epidemic. Diphtheria appeared sporadically in three sections near the River, but was not of a very severe type and was soon controlled..."

- D. Lawhead, M.D., Health Officer, Annual Report of the Yolo County Board of Health, 1902.



Public health nurses examine a patient at the immigration and quarantine facility on Ellis Island, New York, circa 1900. (photo from *Plagues and Politics*, Fitzhugh Mullan, M.D., 1989)



Ad from the California anti-tobacco campaign, 2004. California Department of Health Services.

### #10 Atherosclerosis



Diet and exercise behaviors established in childhood often set the stage for chronic disease later in life.

As infectious diseases declined as a cause of death, Motor Vehicle Accidents, Heart Disease, Cancer, Stroke and Diabetes began to rise as leading causes of death.

Due in part to Public Health regulations and programs targeting drunk driving and passenger/road safety (e.g., car seats) Motor Vehicle Accident death rates continue to decrease. Similarly, local and statewide Public Health anti-tobacco efforts are largely credited with a decline in Lung Cancer and Emphysema deaths throughout California.

Public Health's most recent challenge is the obesity epidemic. Diet and exercise appear to play an important role in many leading causes of death. In some cases Heart Disease, certain Cancers, Stroke, Diabetes and a host of other conditions may be better managed or prevented through a healthy diet and regular exercise.

Data Sources: Yolo County Archives, Death Certificates & Burial Permits 1904-1906; California Department of Health Services, Office of Vital Records, Death Records 1999-2003.

Prepared by the Yolo County Health Department, Epidemiology Program, March 2005. Special thanks to Mel Russel of the Yolo County Archives.