

## Medical Terms – Causes of Death

The information provided below is not meant to be definitive and is provided simply to elaborate on the terminology contained in the listing of cause of death in the article about deaths in St. Jacques between 1900 and 1910.

**[Consumption](#)** – This is an old, but common term for wasting away of the body from pulmonary tuberculosis (TB). It is also known by the Greek word phtisis which means consumption. Before there was effective treatment for the disease people who contracted it seemed to literally be consumed by the disease.

**[Debility](#)** - Literally, it means lack of movement or staying in bed. General debility is characterized by abnormal bodily weakness or feebleness; a decay of strength. It was sometimes written as nervous debility.

**[Paralysis](#)** - It is simply defined as the complete loss of strength in a body part such as an arm or leg or muscle group brought on by nerve damage to the brain or spinal cord. Some of the most common causes of damage to the brain include stroke, tumor, trauma caused by a fall or a blow, Multiple Sclerosis or cerebral palsy.

**[Ear Disease](#)** – Ear disease could refer to a number of problems but it most likely refers to ear infection which is more common among children than it is with adults.

**Tuberculosis** – Tuberculosis, often simply referred to as TB is still a potentially fatal contagious disease. It can affect almost any part of the body though it mostly occurs as an infection of the lungs. Prior to the development of antibiotics the method used to prevent the spread of the disease was to isolate patients in hospitals or specially designated facilities called sanatoria. Many people from rural parts of the province spent time at the Sanatorium in St. John's fighting off tuberculosis. It is commonly referred to as "The San."

**Stillborn** – This term refers to an infant dead at the time of birth.

**Convulsions** - A convulsion is an abnormal, involuntary contraction of the muscles that is associated mostly with seizure disorders such as epilepsy. Someone experiencing convulsions appear to be shaking out of control. Other than epilepsy other possible causes of convulsions include high fever, meningitis, drug or alcohol abuse, poisoning, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), and head injury. [Febrile convulsions](#) occur in children between 6 months and five years. They are usually associated with a fever without any known underlying cause.

**[Bright's Disease](#)** - A broad descriptive term that was once used to describe a variety of kidney diseases that today would be that would be described as acute or chronic [nephritis](#), inflammation of the Kidney's. It gets its name from Richard Bright, an English physician who described the diseases in 1827.

**[Dropsy](#)** – This is an old term for the swelling of soft tissues due to the retention of excess water in the body. Around 1900 a person would be diagnosed as having dropsy which today is called [edema](#), which is most obvious in the lower legs where fluid pools during the day when the person is upright. Today the person might be said to have edema due to congestive heart failure.

**Apoplexy** - Apoplexy was a term used to refer to any sudden death where the individual suddenly lost consciousness just before dying. It was usually attributed to hemorrhaging on the brain which is now referred to as stroke.

**Croup** - Croup is a respiratory condition usually brought on by a serious viral infection of the upper airway. Swelling inside the throat can interfere with breathing causing the person to sound as though they are barking instead of coughing. Symptoms can be mild, moderate, or severe symptoms, and often are worse at night. Croup affects about 15% of children with symptoms going away in one or two days. In rare cases it can bring on cardiac arrest or respiratory failure.

**La Grippe** – This is an old description of what we know today as Influenza or “The Flu”.

**Scarlet Fever** - Historically, scarlet fever resulted in mortality rates of 15%-20%, however, with the advent of antibiotics, mortality rates are now less than 1%. A child with scarlet fever may experience chills, body aches, a loss of appetite, feelings of nausea, and repeated vomiting. A rash that feels like itchy sunburn with tiny bumps will appear all over the body. They eventually merge giving the body a red appearance. Today it is quite successfully treated with antibiotics. It is contagious and prior to antibiotics often wiped out all children in a family.

**Typhoid Fever** – Typhoid Fever is a common bacterial disease transmitted by the eating of food or drinking of water contaminated with feces from an infected person, which contain a bacterium causing the illness. If left untreated typhoid fever works through four distinct stages, each one of them lasting about one week. The patient becomes more exhausted and emaciated as each stage progresses. Transmission of this bacterium occurs only among humans. It only spreads in environments where human feces or urine come into contact with food or drinking water.