…the death toll had just begun to climb. The spotted typhus epidemic spread through the ghetto in thousands of ways. The refugee center blazed with its fire. From there, thousands of beggars spread it through the streets. Lice infestation was everywhere. Merely walking a hundred meters along the street exposed one to great danger. One had only to brush against a person infested with lice to discover these dangerous vermin in the evening while examining each piece of clothing; then there was the terrible wait in fear and trepidation for the fourteenth day to see whether the temperature would rise sharply. The children of the streets contributed most to the spread of the epidemic. They were everywhere, running at dizzying speed through the crowds, rubbing against every pedestrian. Among children, the disease is not dangerous but they spread it, without being aware of what they were doing.

Before the war, the monthly death rate among Jews in the city of Warsaw generally exceeded three hundred. Since the Quarter had been sealed off, the death rate had spiraled at a terrifying rate. In January and February of 1942, at the height of the typhus epidemic, the mortality rate in the Jewish Quarter exceeded five thousand a month.

In the street every few hundred paces, one could see a human corpse covered with newspaper. Somehow, with the passage of time, people got used to this sight and only the most sensitive crossed to the opposite side of the street and turned their heads away. But even the most courageous or insensitive lost their nerve when, in the darkness of the night, they happened to accidentally step on some soft object that turned out to be a cadaver. On these occasions, invariably, hysterical screams rang out. The number of burial enterprises rapidly increased. They used the old-fashioned type of horse-drawn hearse that carried eight corpses simultaneously. Six were inside the hearse while two were placed on the roof. From beneath the sheets that covered them, it was quite common to see a brownish emaciated leg sticking out.
The horde of human beings in the ghetto were drowning in heaps of refuse and animal waste which the “authorities” had forbidden us to remove from the Quarter. It wasn’t until many long months had passed and the disease had spread to the Aryan homes adjacent to our terrible Quarter that the Germans finally relented and agreed to the removal of the refuse. Meanwhile, all kinds of household and industrial waste had accumulated in public squares and burnt-out houses and ever-increasing mounds were forming in the narrow courtyards of the tenements. In some places they reached up to the first floor of the buildings, although an instinct for self-preservation advised most people to throw at least some of their refuse into the street. Then, in spite of the cold winter of 1940-1941 that delayed the process of decay, offensive smells began to pervade the air everywhere.