

# Earliest recorded case of the bubonic plague history essay

[History](#)



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Heather Olson Biology II. period 5 February 15, 2013

## **The Bubonic Plague**

### **History**

Although the earliest recorded case of the bubonic plague we possess occurred in China in 224 B. C., the disease has existed for thousands of years. In the spring of 1348, the plague reached the shores of Bristol from a merchant ship from the East. Bristol was one of the largest cities in England. With a population of over 10, 000 people, with poor sanitation and health services. This made it the perfect place for the plague to thrive and spread rapidly all over the country. The merchant ship that docked in the ports of Bristol contained rats infected with *Yersinia Pestis*. These rats nested in the silks, boxes of goods, linens, and wool on board. Even as the sailors docked the ship, men on board were already dying from the disease. The bubonic plague spread like fire not only in the crowded city of Bristol, but in many other cities the merchant ships made stops in. With the sick and dying everywhere, priests and doctors were in high demand. Doctors began abandoning their duties for fear of catching the " Black Death", as it was called, and because of this, monks and nuns began attempting to fill the role of a doctor. But as these friars went from home to home reading the dying, their Last Rites and keeping them as comfortable as possible in their last days, little did they know they were only spreading the disease and infecting themselves. 90% of monks and 75% of medics died because of their close connections with the bubonic plague. No one was able to find a cure for the plague because it took it's victims so quickly. With death everywhere, Europe was in a state of panic. Every winter, the disease would die off for a while

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before coming back, with full force, in the spring. No one made the connection that this was due to the flea and rat population. This viscous cycle carried on for five years before the Black Death receded temporarily. The plague never truly died off. About 35% of Europe's population, if not more, died in the 1300's from Black Death; that's about 43 million people. In that time, the life span of a man drastically dropped from 35 years old, to 20.

## **Ring Around a Rosie**

Ironically, the poem "Ring Around a Rosie", so innocently sung by children, is referring to the deadly bubonic plague. "A ring around a rosie" describes the circles, or rings, that would form around the red, swollen lymph nodes that would appear in the neck, armpits, and groin of an infected person. "A Pocketful of Posies" was supposedly a medicinal way to ward off the disease. When the bubonic plague would infect a city, most people would carry posies, a small group of flowers or herbs, in their pockets. This method was mostly based on superstition. "Ashes, Ashes" is speaking of the many corpses, found in abandoned homes and on the sides of busy streets, that were cremated. "We all fall down" describes the rapid death of the person infected with the plague. Even though this is sung or read as a silly rhyme, it's roots are morbid. "A Ring Around the Rosies" is not the only saying that originated from the dreaded disease. Even today, out of habit and politeness a person will say "God bless you" when they hear someone sneeze; however, most people do not know why we say this. In 590 A. D., there was an outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in Rome. Because sneezing was believed to be one of the first symptoms of the plague, Pope Gregory started reciting

" God bless you" to any who did. By doing so, Pope Gregory was trying to say " may God protect you and not let you not be infected."

## **Symptoms**

Symptoms of the Bubonic Plague will occur two to six days after infection. Early Symptoms of the plague include buboes (the inflaming and swelling of a lymph node, usually with the build up of pus, especially in the region of the neck, armpit, or groin), nausea, fever, chills, headache, abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhea, tiny broken blood vessels (petechiae), and decreased appetite. When the bacteria that causes the bubonic plague, *Yersinia Pestis*, enters the bloodstream, this means the initial disease has progressed to the septicemic plague. Symptoms include delirium, chills, fever, rapid heart rate, nausea, vomiting, severe headache, and may eventually lead to death. Ten to twenty percent of people infected will develop symptoms in the lungs, called the pneumonic plague. Pneumonic plague is most often fatal and share symptoms similar to the septicemic plague.

## **A Cure**

Today, symptom treating medications and antibiotics, like streptomycin and tetracycline, are given to cure the plague and is effective in 85 percent of all cases. Apart from antibiotics, the best cure for the plague is prevention. A few methods used for prevention are keeping the rat population to a minimum, watching for any possible cases of the plague in animals or humans, treating all pets for fleas, and the periodic spraying of insecticides to keep the flea population down. The bubonic plague is only an issue in urban cities that are not sanitized well. The vaccine for the bubonic plague is

not available in the U. S., but it is used in various countries where a few cases of the plague are common. Without treatment for the *Yersinia pestis* virus, the human body can effectively fight it off in 10 to 50 percent of all cases; otherwise, it will most likely lead to death.

## **The Mystery of the Plague**

In the 1890's, remains of the black plague victims were being dug up and examined closely by Alexandre Emile Jean Yersin, a French bacteriologist, and Paul Lewis Simond, a French physician and biologist. The reason for this was to find the cause of the dreaded disease and to learn how to keep it from spreading. Simond's experiment was to take some of the virus and infect one of his two rats. The rats were kept in a slightly open cage, but were kept from touching each other. When both rats became infected and died, it proved that the flea was the culprit, who was able to jump from cage to cage, that was causing the spread of the disease.

## **The Bubonic Plague Today**

Epidemics of the bubonic plague still occur today in primitive countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Zaire, Mozambique, and Botswana. In 2010, a man from Oregon contracted the bubonic plague. While trying to pry a dead rat from the throat of his cat, the man cut his finger on the rat's teeth. When he quickly came down with severe flu-like symptoms, he went to the doctor and was diagnosed. Because of our advanced medicine today, this man was able to recover.