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Almost half of the people of Western Europe died in a great sickness known as the Bubonic Plague. The plague was also referred to as "the Black Death” because the skin of diseased people turned a dark gray color. It apparently began in China’s Gobi Desert, and it killed about 35 million Asian people. When sailors traveled to Asia, rats returned with them to Europe. Fleas living on the blood of infected rats then transferred the disease to the European people.

In 1347, Italian merchant ships returned from the Black Sea, one of the links along the trade route between Europe and China. Many of the sailors were already dying of the plague, and within days the disease had spread from the port cities to the surrounding countryside. The disease spread as far as England within a year.

The Europeans were susceptible to disease because they lived in crowded surroundings with very poor sanitary conditions. The Europeans often ate stale or diseased meat because refrigeration had not yet been invented. Also, medicine was primitive and unable to remedy an illness that modern technology might have cured. Bad medical advice also advanced the plague. People were often advised to not bathe because open skin pores might let in the disease.

Death from the plague was horrible, but swift. The Italian writer Boccaccio said victims often “ate lunch with their friends, and ate dinner with their ancestors in paradise.” The first signs were generally aching limbs, and vomiting of blood. Then the lymph nodes would begin to swell. The lymph nodes are glands found in the neck, armpits, and groin. The swelling continued for three or four days until the lymph nodes burst. The swiftness of the disease, the enormous pain, the grotesque appearance of the victims, all served to make the plague especially horrifying.

Some Europeans believed the plague was a sign from God. Groups known as flagellants tried to atone for the sins of the world by inflicting punishments upon themselves. They also had a tendency to persecute Jews and even clergymen who spoke out against them. Pope Clement VI condemned the flagellants, but they continued to reappear in times of plague.

The Bubonic Plague continued to affect cities from time to time for hundreds of years. It still exists and is common among rodents. We have a cure for the disease, but occasionally people in isolated places still die from the Bubonic Plague.

**Impacts of the Black Death**

* The Black Death killed so many people that they were buried without priests or ceremonies (causes a loss in religious faith).
* In some villages nearly everyone died or fled. 75 – 200 million people were killed.
* The manor system fell apart because there were not enough people to work the fields.
* Serfs were able to become free labors and their quality of life increased.
* People abandoned the manors and villages and moved to the cities.

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| http://www.msnbc.msn.com/images/MSNBC/msnbc_ban.gif  **MSNBC.com** |



**L.A. woman diagnosed with bubonic plague**

Patient in stable condition with rare, modern case of 'Black Death'

**The Associated Press**

updated 2:18 p.m. CT, Wed., April. 19, 2006

LOS ANGELES - A woman is in stable condition with bubonic plague, the first confirmed human case in Los Angeles County since 1984, health officials said Tuesday.

The woman, who was not identified, was admitted to a hospital April 13 with a fever, swollen lymph nodes and other symptoms. A blood test confirmed the bacterial disease, and she was given antibiotics, officials said.

Bubonic plague is not contagious, but if left untreated it can morph into pneumonic plague, which is. Bubonic plague is usually transmitted to humans from the bites of fleas infected by rodents.

Health officials said they suspect the woman was exposed by fleas in her home and that there was no cause for alarm. An estimated 10 to 20 Americans contract plague each year, mostly in rural communities.

Bubonic plague is believed to have been the "Black Death" that killed 25 million people in Europe between 1346 and 1351.

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**URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12387983/>

**The Black Death Study Questions**

1. How many people were killed in Western Europe by the Black Death?
2. Why was the bubonic plague called the Black Death?
3. Where did the black plague begin, and how many people did it kill?
4. How did the Black Death get from Asia to Europe?
5. When did the Black Death first arrive in Europe?
6. Why were Europeans susceptible to this disease?
7. What were some of the symptoms of the Black Death?
8. Who were the “flagellants” and what did they do?
9. What were some of the impacts of the Black Death on Europe?



**“The Black Death Strikes Sicily” by Michael Platiensis**







 

1. What happened to bodies of people who died?
2. How did the disease spread from Messina to the rest of Sicily?
3. What do you think was the worst effect of the plague on the people of Sicily?