

New research paper says we are still at risk of the plague

March 15 2013

Today archaeologists [unearthed a 'Black Death' grave in London](#), containing more than a dozen skeletons of people suspected to have died from the plague. The victims are thought to have died during the 14th century and archaeologists anticipate finding many more as they excavate the site.

The Plague is by definition a re-[emerging infectious disease](#) which affects the lungs and is highly contagious, leading to mass outbreaks across populations. History shows us that population levels suffered globally due to the plague, with around 75 million people globally perishing during the 14th century [Black Death](#).

This study, published in *Infection, Genetics and Evolution*, analysed the Great Plague of Marseille, which caused 100,000 deaths between 1720 and 1723. The researchers aimed to highlight issues we are facing with infectious diseases today, to identify the best ways to respond to epidemics and whether we are still at risk of the plague re-emerging again.

Results show that a number of factors show we are still at risk of plague today. This is largely due to transport trade and novel threats in developing countries where multi-drug [resistant pathogens](#) are currently emerging and spreading rapidly. This [genetic change](#) has also contributed to a development in the way the bacteria infect new hosts meaning they can now live in [mammalian blood](#).

The study also highlighted the need for effective management of epidemics in future. Fear of infection can have a negative impact on a population's economic situation due to a significant loss of tourism, and widespread panic. History has shown us that providing the necessary information about diseases and improving the management of epidemics are vital steps for avoiding panic and containing diseases.

More information: This article is "Small oversights that led to the Great Plague of Marseille (1720 - 1723): Lessons from the past" by Christian A. Devaux ([DOI: 10.1016/j.meegid.2012.11.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.meegid.2012.11.016)), and appears in *Infection, Genetics and Evolution*.

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