

# The Great Plague

## What was the Great Plague?

During the summer of 1665, London was affected by a horrible disease.

This became known as the Great Plague.

People were terrified of the plague, as there was no cure.

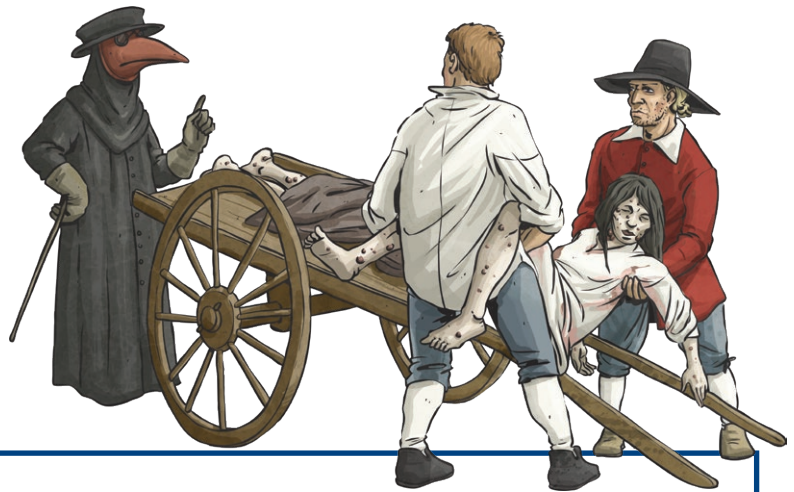
It lasted from 1665 until 1666.

## Why was there no cure?

At this time, medicine and health care were very different than they are today.

Hygiene was often very poor; towns and villages could be dirty. Plumbed toilets had not been invented so people emptied their chamber pots into the streets.

People had a different understanding of medicine at this time.



## How did the plague spread?

- At first, people were not sure how the plague was spread.
- Some doctors felt that bad air was to blame, and breathing in made people ill.
- Others blamed farm animals for spreading the disease.
- However, the cause of the plague was rats.
- Rats carried bacteria and fleas.
- When the fleas bit people, they infected them.
- When people sneezed and coughed, they spread the disease even more.

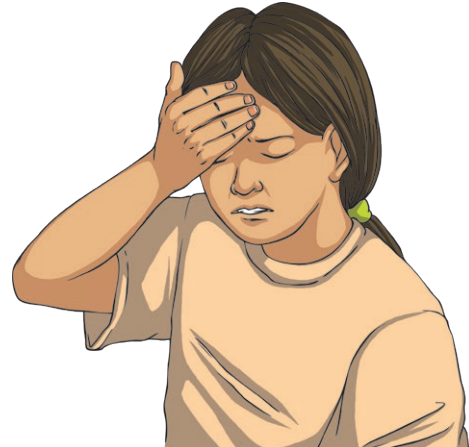


## What happened if someone caught the plague?

The plague spread very quickly. Within three to four days of catching the disease, people were dying.

Some symptoms included:

- painful swelling of the skin;
- blisters;
- headaches;
- sickness.



If someone from a family got the plague, the whole house was closed up and nobody was allowed to leave, or enter the house.

A red cross was marked on the front door of any these houses, so people knew that they had the plague.

As many as 100 000 people had died in London by the end of 1665.

## How was the plague stopped?

**Cold weather** – Autumn 1666. This killed off many of the rats and the bacteria.

**The Great Fire of London** – 1666. This destroyed many rat-infested buildings. This meant there were less rats to spread the disease.



### Plague Remedies

As there was no cure, people tried different methods to try to prevent them from getting the plague.

- Small bunches of flowers: people thought that holding them to their noses, would stop them from breathing in any bad air or bacteria.
- Lucky charms: people wore them to ward off the plague, one example is wearing a dead toad around the neck!
- Soaking vinegar in money: when paying for goods, money was soaked in vinegar before giving it to someone else.

# The Great Plague

## What was the Great Plague?

During the summer of 1665, London was rocked by a horrible disease. This became known as the Great Plague. People were terrified of the plague, as there was no cure and little was known about how it was spread.

## Health and hygiene

In 1665, medicine and health care were very different than they are today. Hygiene was often very poor; towns and villages could be dirty. Plumbed toilets had not been invented

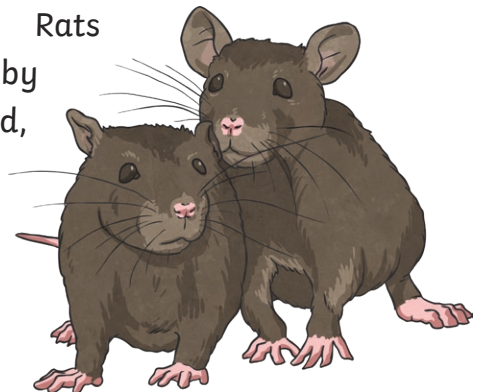
so people emptied their chamber pots into the streets. Also, doctors and researchers did not know as much about medicine as they do now, consequently many diseases had no cure. This meant that the disease spread rapidly.



## How the plague spread

At first, people were unsure about how the plague was spread. They hoped that if the reason could be found, the plague could be controlled or stopped. Some doctors felt that poisonous air was to blame, and if people breathed bad air in, they became unwell. Others blamed farm animals.

However, the cause of the plague was rats. Rats carried bacteria, which was spread to people by flea bites. When people sneezed and coughed, they spread the disease even more. The Mayor of London believed that dogs and cats were to blame. Consequently, he ordered that these animals were destroyed.

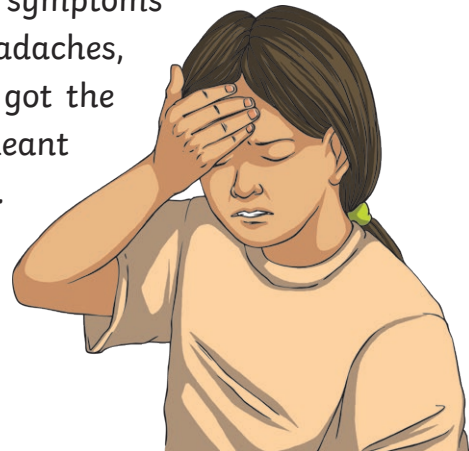




## What happened if someone caught the plague?

The plague spread very quickly. Within three to four days of catching the disease, people were dying. Some symptoms were painful swelling of the skin, blisters, headaches, fever and sickness. If someone from a family got the plague, the whole house was sealed. This meant that nobody could get in or out of the building. A red cross was marked on the front door of any houses where somebody had the plague.

As many as 100 000 people had died in London by the end of 1665.



## How was the plague stopped?

In the autumn of 1666, the weather was very cold. This killed many of the rats and fleas which were spreading the virus. Also, the Great Fire of London, in the same year, destroyed many rat-infested buildings. This seriously reduced the rat population.



### Plague Remedies

As there was no cure, people tried alternative remedies to try to prevent them from being infected by the plague.

- **Small bunches of flowers:** people thought that holding them to their noses, would stop them from breathing in any bad air or bacteria.
- **Lucky charms:** people wore them to ward off the plague, one example is wearing a dead toad around the neck!
- **Soaking vinegar in money:** when paying for goods, money was soaked in vinegar before giving it to someone else.

# The Great Plague

## What was the Great Plague?

During the summer of 1665, London was rocked by a horrific disease, which became known as the Great Plague. Despite the fact that there had been an outbreak of the plague (the Black Death) 300 years before this, there was still no cure. For this reason, people were terrified of the plague as they were aware that, for many, it meant certain death. 1665 was during the seventeenth century and at this time, medicine and health care were very different than they are today. Hygiene was often very poor; towns and villages could be dirty and unsanitary. Plumbed toilets had not been invented so people emptied their chamber pots into the streets. Also, medical knowledge was limited and this explains why the plague caused so much destruction.



## How the plague spread

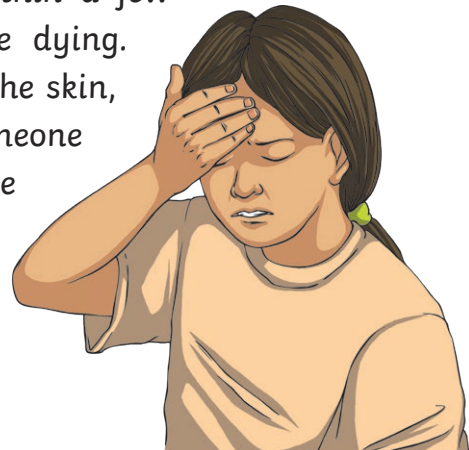
There were many concerns about how the plague was spread. It was hoped that if the cause of the plague could be found, it could be better controlled or stopped. Some doctors felt that poisonous or bad air was to blame. As people continued to breathe it in, they became unwell. Others blamed farm animals.

However, the cause of the plague was rats. Rats carried bacteria, which was spread to people by flea bites. When people sneezed and coughed, they spread the disease even more. The Mayor of London believed that domestic animals, such as dogs and cats were to blame. He ordered that these animals were destroyed.



## What happened if someone caught the plague?

The plague spread extremely quickly, and within a few days of contracting the disease, people were dying. The infected suffered from painful swelling of the skin, blisters, headaches, fever and vomiting. If someone from a household contracted the plague, the whole house was sealed. A red cross was marked on the front door of any houses where somebody had the plague, along with the words 'Lord have mercy on us'. Historians believe that 100 000 people died in London by the end of 1665.



## How was the plague stopped?

In the autumn of 1666, the weather was particularly cold. This killed of many of the rats and fleas which were spreading the virus, as well as reducing the spread of bacteria. Also, the Great Fire of London, in the same year, which destroyed thousands of homes and buildings, also helped to stop the plague. The fire spread rapidly due to the fact that the houses were so close together and made of wood. The fire destroyed many rat-infested buildings, severely reducing the rat population.



### Plague Remedies

As there was no cure, people tried alternative remedies to try to prevent them from contracting the plague.

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- **Lucky charms:** people wore them to ward off the plague, one example is wearing a dead toad around the neck!
- **Soaking money in vinegar:** when paying for goods, money was soaked in vinegar before giving it to someone else.