

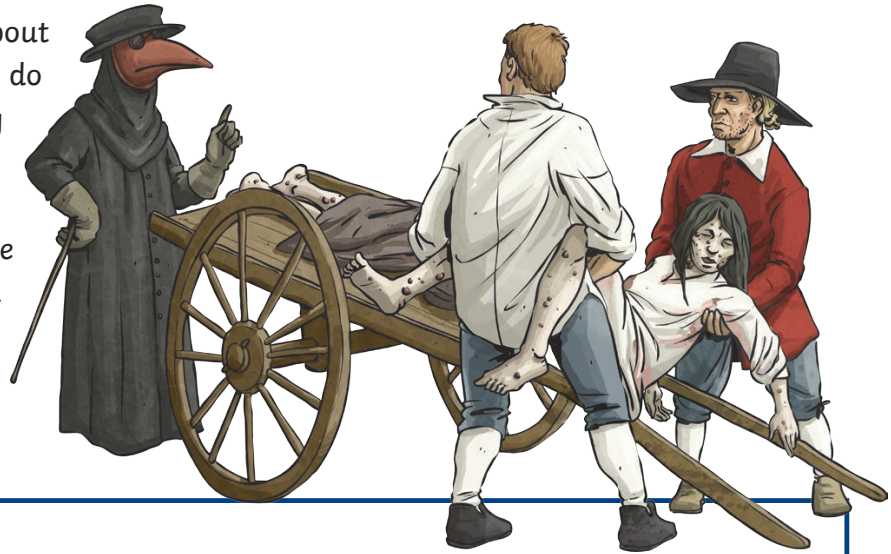
# The Great Plague

## 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. 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.

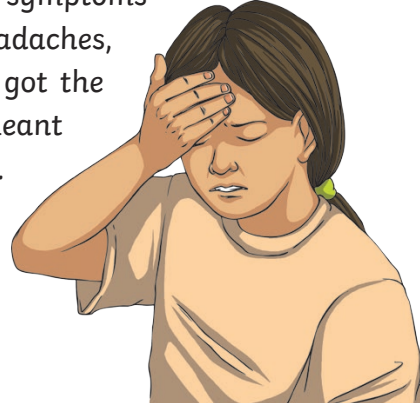
However, the cause of the plague was rats. Rats carried bacteria, which was spread to people by flea bites. When people sneezed and coughed, they spread the disease even more. The Mayor of London believed that dogs and cats were to blame. Consequently, he ordered that these animals were destroyed.



### 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 off 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 money in vinegar:** when paying for goods, money was soaked in vinegar before giving it to someone else.

# Questions

1. Why was the plague so frightening to people?

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2. What reasons could there be, for there being no cure for the Great Plague?

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3. How did people try to prevent themselves from catching the plague?

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4. Why might the fact that many cats and dogs were killed, have actually helped the outbreak to spread further?

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5. Why do you think houses with the plague were sealed, even though it meant the families inside would die without help?

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6. How was the plague eventually controlled and stopped?

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## The Great Plague

7. How must it have felt to be living in London at this time? Explain your answer using as much detail as possible, and remember to use evidence from the text.

[illegible]

# Answers

1. Why was the plague so frightening to people?  
**The plague was frightening as there was no cure and for many it meant certain death.**
2. What reasons could there be, for there being no cure for the Great Plague?  
**The reasons why there was no cure are that the doctors did not know as much about medicine and diseases as we do now. Also the conditions were unhygienic, and this makes it hard to treat disease.**
3. How did people try to prevent themselves from catching the plague?  
**Many tried holding small bunches of flowers to their noses, to stop themselves from breathing in bacteria. Some people wore lucky charms, such as a dead toad around their necks**
4. Why might the fact that many cats and dogs were killed, have actually helped the outbreak to spread further?  
**Cats and dogs were predators of rats, so therefore there were less animals to kill the rats. This meant their population grew, so there were more rats to spread disease.**
5. Why do you think houses with the plague were sealed, even though it meant the families inside would die without help? **The houses were sealed because there was no other way to stop the disease from spreading. By keeping those infected inside and unable to have contact with others, it was hoped the disease would stop being spread.**
6. What does rat-infested mean?  
**Rat-infested means that the buildings has been taken over by rats. The buildings were overrun with rats.**
7. How was the plague eventually controlled and stopped?  
**The cold weather killed many of the rats and fleas, who were the cause of the plague, as well as killing bacteria. Also the Great Fire of London destroyed many rat-infested buildings, killing more rats.**
8. How must it have felt to be living in London at this time? Explain your answer using as much detail as possible, and remember to use evidence from the text.  
**Various answers, but answers must refer to the sense of fear and the unknown. Also the sadness and despair at seeing so many people falling victim to the plague. Some answers may discuss how doctors must have felt helpless and frustrated that there was so little they could do to help people.**