**Death Defined**

***Please note: this document contains graphic descriptions of plague symptoms, causes, and results.***

**What was it like for a victim of the plague?**

It started with a headache. Then chills and fever, which left him exhausted and prostrate. Maybe he experienced nausea, vomiting, back pain, soreness in his arms and legs. Perhaps bright light was too bright to stand.

Within a day or two, the swellings appeared. They were hard, painful, burning lumps on his neck, under his arms, on his inner thighs. Soon they turned black, split open, and began to ooze pus and blood. They may have grown to the size of an orange.

Maybe he recovered. It was possible to recover. But more than likely, death would come quickly. Yet... perhaps not quickly enough. Because after the lumps appeared he would start to bleed internally. There would be blood in his urine, blood in his stool, and blood puddling under his skin, resulting in black boils and spots all over his body. Everything that came out of his body smelled utterly revolting. He would suffer great pain before he breathed his last. And he would die barely a week after he first contracted the disease.

The swellings, called buboes, were the victim's lymph nodes, and they gave the Bubonic Plague its name. But the bubonic form of the disease was only one manifestation of the horrible pandemic that swept Europe in the 1340s. Another form was Pneumonic Plague. The victims of Pneumonic Plague had no buboes, but they suffered severe chest pains, sweated heavily, and coughed up blood. Virtually no one survived the pneumonic form.

The third manifestation was Septicemic Plague. This sickness would befall when the contagion poisoned the victim's bloodstream. Victims of Septicemic Plague died the most swiftly, often before any notable symptoms had a chance to develop. Another form, Enteric Plague, attacked the victim's digestive system, but it too killed the patient too swiftly for diagnosis of any kind.

Medieval Europeans had no way of knowing any of this. The causes of plague were not discovered until the late nineteenth century.

Plague is carried by rodents like rats and squirrels, but it is [transmitted](http://historymedren.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://ponderosa%2Dpine.uoregon.edu/students/Janis/trans.html) to humans by the fleas who live on them. A flea, having ingested plague-infected blood from its host, can live for as much as a month away from that host before he needs to find another warm body to live on. When a [blood-engorged flea](http://historymedren.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/plague/cheob6x4.htm) attempts to draw blood from another victim, it invariably injects into that victim some of the blood already within it. If the injected blood contains the bacterium yersinia pestis, the result is Bubonic Plague. Fleas were, alas, such a part of everyday life that no one noticed them much. In this invisible manner the plague spread from rat to human and to cat and dog, as well.

Pneumonic plague is airborne. It is contracted by breathing the infected water droplets breathed (or coughed) out by a victim of the disease. The pneumonic form was much more virulent and spread much more quickly and just as invisibly.

Plague is occasionally transmitted by direct contact with a carrier through open sores or cuts, directly into the bloodstream. This could result in any form of the plague except pneumonic, although it is likely that such incidents most often resulted in the septicemic variety. The septicemic and enteric forms of the plague killed most quickly of all, and probably accounted for the stories of individuals going to bed apparently healthy and never waking up.

People died so swiftly and in such high numbers that burial pits were dug, filled to overflowing and abandoned; bodies (sometimes still living) were shut up in houses which were then burned to the ground; and corpses were left where they died in the streets.

**For the First Time in History, Time Mattered.**

The hourglass and mechanical clock were invented during the plague years.  Labor was suddenly valuable and had to be measured.  Wealth was expected to grow and time was critical in understanding the productivity that determined growth.  It is no accident that Adam Smith and his definition of Capitalism arrived at the end of the plague. This change in the relationship between time and humankind had long lasting affects on the world.  In pre-plague Europe the time measuring device was the sundial.  In fact, by the 10th century, pocket sundials were commonplace.  A pocket sundial is very helpful if you want to know if it is morning, afternoon, or night.  But accuracy past those delineations of the day is pretty illusive in such a crude device.  In post-plague Europe, where time became money, the mechanical clock became the king.

**How To Avoid the Plague**

Should you forget to get innoculated before you travel back to the 14th century, you'll need to take some measures to avoid the deadly Bubonic Plague.

***Here's How:***

1.    Keep some clean clothes tightly folded and bound up in cloth treated with pennyroyal, preferably in a cedar chest far from all animals and vermin.

2.    At the first whisper of plague in the area, flee any populated town or village and head for an isolated villa, far from any trade routes, with your cedar chest.

3.    Vigilantly clean every last corner of your villa, killing all rats and burning their corpses.

4.    Use plenty of pennyroyal to discourage fleas.

5.    Allow no cats or dogs to come near you.

6.    Once away from all human contact, wash in extremely hot water, change into your clean clothes, and burn the clothes you traveled in.

7.    Keep a minimum distance of 25 feet from any other human being to avoid catching any pneumonic form spread through breathing and sneezing.

8.    Have your armies burn and raze to the ground any nearby houses where plague victims have resided.

9.    Pray to the deity or the saint of your choice frequently and fervently.

10.    Stay where you are until six months after the most recent nearby outbreak.

***Tips:***

Do not enter an enclosed community such as a castle or monastery.

Do not under any circumstances board a ship.

If possible, try to establish your residence in Bohemia before 1347, and don't leave until long after 1353.