

A TIMELINE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

MEDIEVAL: 500 - 1450

Christian Hospitals care for sick people but there isn't a serious attempt to cure patients or research illness. Hospitals are mostly funded by the Church or wealthy patrons.



Islamic Hospitals called Bimaristans treat patients and not simply caring for them.



Medieval Towns are breeding grounds of disease. Few have sewers, rubbish is thrown onto the street and trade waste pollutes rivers and streams. Some local action is made, but doesn't stop unhygienic conditions.

Monasteries and abbeys are far more hygienic. Monks and nuns understand the importance of cleanliness and good sanitation - they have fresh running water, keep privies away from water sources, have infirmaries and understand herbal remedies for illness. Lastly, they are isolated away from towns.



The Black Death 1348 was a combination of the bubonic and pneumonic plague spread by rats and fleas, and contact with breath or blood. It spread rapidly in cities and there was no understanding of the cause or a cure - many believed it was a punishment from God or the result of outsiders such as Jews or beggars. Almost 2 million people in Britain died.

RENAISSANCE: 1450 - 1700

The Great Plague 1665 was a return of the plague. Around 100,000 people died in London alone. However there was a greater attempt to control the epidemic: victims were quarantined with watchmen to stop people breaking quarantine. Houses with the plague were marked with an 'X'. Homeowners were made to tidy the street in front of their houses and animals were banned from the streets. Bodies were removed at night and thrown into plague pits.



Cholera regularly kills tens of thousands in London. In 1831 a cholera outbreak kills 50,000.

18th CENTURY

New hospitals are opened in the 1700s. Between 1720 - 50 there are 5 new hospitals in London. Specialist hospitals are also setup for maternity care, venereal disease and mental health care.

Industrial Towns are breeding grounds of disease. Cities like Manchester grow to around 100,000 inhabitants in half a century. People live in crowded terrace housing without enough toilets, without running water or waste removal. Diseases such as Cholera, Typhoid and Tuberculosis spread rapidly in these conditions.



Edwin Chadwick publishes a report in 1842 about conditions in Britain. Although he wrongly believes disease is caused by Miasma, he identifies the need for cleaner streets and clear water and his report is widely read, however no action is taken.

INDUSTRIAL: 1800 - 1900

Public Health Act 1848 gives councils the power to spend money on improving hygiene in towns. Only some towns make improvements and in 1854 the Central Board of Health is closed down because laissez-faire ideas mean that many politicians are against government action.

John Snow in 1854 makes the discovery that Cholera is spread through contaminated water after researching a water pump in Broad Street, London.



The 1858 'Great Stink' heatwave causes the filthy Thames river to smell worse than ever. Even politicians are affected as Parliament is on the river. Finally, politicians call for a sewer to be built to improve the condition of the Thames. This is built by Joseph Bazalgette and brings better sanitation to London.

Public Health Act 1875 forces councils to appoint Medical Officers and to provide sewers, fresh water and to collect rubbish. Hygiene rapidly improves.

MODERN: 1900 +

Reports by Charles Booth (1888) and Seebohm Rowntree (1901) reveal that working class people remain stuck in lives of poverty and ill health. In 1899 during the Boer War, some 40% of volunteers for the army are found to be unfit to serve.

Liberal Reforms 1906 - 1914 introduce School Meals, School Clinics and Doctors, Unemployment Benefits and Old Age Pensions. All of these improve the standard of living and health for the British working classes.

The Welfare State emerges after the 1942 Beveridge Report identifies 'The Five Giants' which still ruin the lives of the working classes - such as disease, squalor and idleness.

The NHS is set up by the Labour Government and spearheaded by Aneurin Bevan in 1948. It provides free medical care for all - previously in the 1940s over 8 million people had never seen a doctor because they couldn't afford to.

