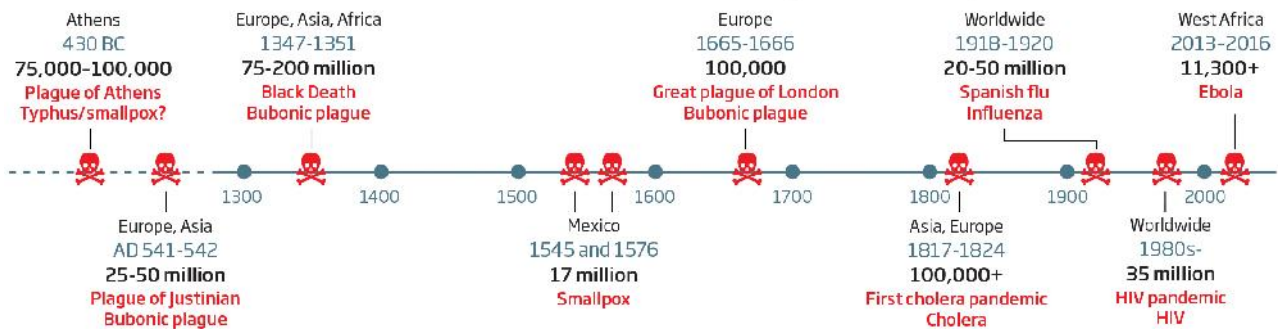


From the *New Scientist* article on Pandemics

Plagued by plagues

Infectious disease used to account for half of all human deaths before the rise of modern medicine, now globalisation is renewing that threat



The graph above appears in the main document, “Plague! How to prepare for the next pandemic” but it was too small to be easily legible so I’ve repeated it here.

The two sections below were in boxes at the end of the main article.

Money matters

As global economies become more interconnected, contagious diseases and their knock-on effects spread more rapidly. “Nowadays the biggest risk from epidemics is economic,” says Ramanan Laxminarayan of Princeton University. The 2003 SARS epidemic killed 800 people, for example, but cost the world \$54 billion in quarantine measures and lost trade and travel. The World Bank estimates that a flu pandemic as bad as the one in 1918 would lop 5 per cent off world GDP and cause an \$8 trillion recession. The faster we respond to an epidemic, the less expensive it will be. So we must be prepared – and that costs. Who will pay?

One answer may be novel funding mechanisms. Last May, the World Bank launched something new: plague insurance. Rich countries are at risk from epidemics that start in poor countries. So under the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility they can buy insurance against severe flu, coronaviruses like SARS or MERS, filoviruses like Ebola, and diseases that pass between animals and humans like Lassa. Premiums are based on risk, calculated for the bank by the epidemiological modelling company Metabiota. If one of these diseases strikes a poor country, money to contain it can be released quickly from the insurance pot. The bank also sells “catastrophe” bonds to fund response to a wider range of epidemics.

How you can reduce the risk of a pandemic

In our increasingly crowded, urban, globalised world, a virus will eventually get out of control. There are things we can all do to reduce the risks.

Bear witness: Inform yourself and do what you can to spread awareness of the risks, and of the responses being devised that desperately need support. Politicians control purses, so get tweeting.

Stand up to denialists: Some will say warnings about pandemics are a hoax, because SARS/bird flu/swine flu was supposed to kill us all and didn’t. Here’s your riposte: a lot of people worked hard to keep SARS contained; bird flu hasn’t gone rogue yet but it’s a few mutations away; swine flu did kill and the next flu could kill far more.

Prepare: You needn't be a survivalist to prepare for the panic and disorder likely to attend a pandemic. Most countries have guidelines that recommend stocking a few weeks' worth of water, food, medicines, flashlight batteries and such. Learn about the best ways to avoid people who might be contagious. If you run a business, have a continuity plan. If you are a public official, check whether your administration has a pandemic plan. If not, check out the WHO's guidelines. If you speak for a health body or organisation, learn about communications in a pandemic because mistakes can be deadly. Hint: trust people with the truth.

Keep watch: Countries don't like to admit they have infectious diseases: it's bad for business. The ProMed global reporting site revealed SARS and MERS before the governments involved did. Now it has helped launch Epicore. Medical and veterinary workers sign up to it, then when ProMed gets wind of something it asks them what's happening. Replies appear on a web platform that can be set to partial or total confidentiality. Wherever you are, if you meet the criteria, sign up to Epicore. You could be the first to spot something amiss.