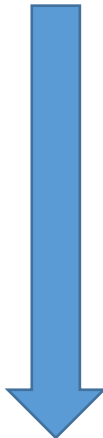


The Black Death

What were the symptoms of the Black Death?



Feeling cold and tired

Buboes big black swellings in armpits and groin

Blisters all over the body

High fever and vomiting

Bleeding under the skin caused dark blotches all over the body

The disease attacked the nervous system causing spasms and terrible pain

Unconsciousness and coma

Death (usually 4 to 7 days after first symptoms)

Sometimes the buboes burst and let out a foul smelling black liquid. When this happened the victim usually lived.

At least 2 million people died in Britain in 1348-49 (over 40% of the population) from the Black Death.

Beliefs about causes

Medieval people did not know the true cause of the Black Death but they had lots of ideas!

- Most people thought it had been **sent by God**. God sent the plague because he was angry that people had spent so much time gambling, fighting and drinking. The plague was therefore a punishment from God.
- They believed the plague was due to '**bad air**'. The planets of Mars and Saturn had moved closer together. This was seen as a sign of terrible or violent things. It had turned the air bad (other people believed the air had been infected by evil vapours released by earthquakes).
- Some people thought the plague was caused by Jews. They said that Jews had poisoned the wells.
- They believed that their bodies were made up of **4 humours** and that the plague was caused because the humours in people's bodies were out of balance.
- They thought that the plague passed from person to person. If you breathed in the terrible smell given off by the plague sores then you'd catch it too.

Prevention and cures

Some of the ways of preventing the Black Death or of curing it made sense based on these beliefs about the causes... others just seemed crazy!

Held herbs up to their noses

Prayed to God

Whipped themselves so God knew they were sorry

Ran away (or forced the sick to leave the village)

Bled and purged the victim to balance the 4 humours

Lit fires and spread perfumes to keep away the bad smells

Went on pilgrimage to holy places e.g. Walsingham

Cut pigeons in half and rubbed over their bodies

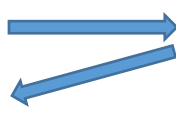
Ate magic spells which had been written down

Any others cures?

Buried clothes of plague victims

After the Black Death

Just over half the population survived the Black Death and life was never the same again.

Life got better	Life stayed the same/got worse
<p>The peasants could get paid more as there were fewer people to do the jobs. But the lords didn't like this so...</p> 	<p>They made a new law called 'The Statute of Labourers' (1351) which said peasants couldn't be paid more than they were before the Black Death.</p>
<p>But the law didn't work because the lords needed workers so they had to pay them higher wages after all!</p>	
<p>Peasants could buy or rent land which had belonged to those who had died. The peasants could become richer from their new land.</p>	<p>Farming methods didn't change. They still did everything by hand with the same tools.</p>
<p>Some peasants rebuilt their homes and made them bigger and more comfortable.</p>	<p>It was harder to find people to trade with as some villages had disappeared and others were too scared of disease spreading.</p>
<p>Many peasants ate more meat and even wore clothes made from coloured material!</p>	<p>People were scared that the plague would return and kill them.</p>
<p>Some villeins could buy their freedom from the lord. This was because there was a shortage of workers so the peasants could bargain with the lords.</p>	<p>Medicine didn't change. None of their methods for curing the plague had worked.</p>
<p>Women had a chance to find work in the towns e.g. Blacksmiths. They could also be more choosy about who and when they married.</p>	<p>People still went to church but there was some talk of the church being too wealthy and not helping the people enough. Wall paintings in churches often showed Death and dying rather than the old more colourful Bible stories.</p>
<p>Prices went down as there were fewer people to buy the goods, which was good if you were buying but not so great if you were trying to sell something!</p>	