

INTERACTIVE

The Bubonic Plague

The bubonic plague, or Black Death, was a killer disease that swept repeatedly through many areas of the world. It wiped out two-thirds of the population in some areas of China, destroyed populations of Muslim towns in Southwest Asia, and then decimated one-third of the European population.

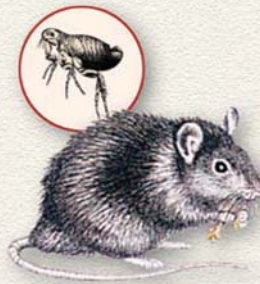
Route of the Plague



- 1 The horse-riding Mongols likely carried infected fleas and rats in their food supplies as they swooped into China.
- 2 The disease came with merchants along the trade routes of Asia to southern Asia, southwest Asia, and Africa.
- 3 In 1345–1346, a Mongol army besieged Kaffa. A year later, Italian merchants returned to Italy, unknowingly bringing the plague with them.

Disease Spreads

Black rats carried fleas that were infested with a bacillus called *Yersinia pestis*. Because people did not bathe, almost all had fleas and lice. In addition, medieval people threw their garbage and sewage into the streets. These unsanitary streets became breeding grounds for more rats. The fleas carried by rats leapt from person to person, thus spreading the bubonic plague with incredible speed.



Patterns of Interaction video series

The Spread of Epidemic Disease: Bubonic Plague and Smallpox

The spread of disease has been a very tragic result of cultures interacting with one another across place and time. Such diseases as smallpox and influenza have killed millions of people, sometimes—as with the Aztecs—virtually destroying civilizations.

Symptoms of the Bubonic Plague


- Painful swellings called buboes (BOO-bohz) in the lymph nodes, particularly those in the armpits and groin
- Sometimes purplish or blackish spots on the skin
- Extremely high fever, chills, delirium, and in most cases, death

Death Tolls, 1300s

Western Europe		20–25 million
China, India, other Asians		25 million
	 = 4 million	



Connect to Today

1. **Hypothesizing** Had people known the cause of the bubonic plague, what might they have done to slow its spread?
 See Skillbuilder Handbook, page R15.
2. **Comparing** What diseases of today might be compared to the bubonic plague? Why?