## Epidemics in words

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Here is some language -- both new and old -- used to describe the communicable diseases referred to in this package.

**- Bacteria:**

Minute biological cells. Bacteria play an essential role in life on earth, for example in digestion. They can also cause disease, including the plague, cholera and tuberculosis.

**- Cluster:**

In medical terms, 'cluster' means several people infected in a specific place. In the case of an epidemic a cluster is a disease hotspot.

**- Confinement:**

Originally used to describe a sick person confined to their bedroom. During the Covid-19 pandemic it has been broadened to describe the measures taken by the authorities to force or strongly encourage their populations to stay at home to limit the disease's spread.

**- Contagion:**

The direct or indirect transmission of an infectious agent from one human to another.

**- Cordon sanitaire:**

The prevention of people's movements to halt a contagious disease. The idea was born in France in the 19th century when Paris sent 30,000 soldiers to block the Spanish border to prevent the spread of a yellow fever epidemic.

**- Covid-19:**

A new disease which first broke out in late December 2019 in central China. It is caused by a new strain of the coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. The illness it causes in humans has been named COVID-19 for "coronavirus disease 2019". The coronavirus includes benign viruses which, for example, cause colds but also redoubtable new strains which have caused the deadly SARS and MERS epidemics in 2002-2003 and 2012.

**- Endemic:**

An infectious disease which strikes continuously in a particular region. It is the case of malaria, dengue fever and AIDS in some regions of Africa.

**- Epidemic:**

An epidemic is declared when a disease -- usually infectious -- spreads in a particular region.

**- Immunity:**

A natural or acquired protection mechanism which allows an individual to efficiently fight off an attack, usually by an infectious agent

The immune system is the complex system of mechanisms, organs, cells and substances involved in the defence against an attack.

**- Infection diseases:**

Illnesses caused by infectious agents: bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites.

**- Pandemic:**

The term pandemic applies when a disease spreads at a global level, affecting at least two continents.

The WHO dubbed the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2019.

**- Quarantine:**

This term goes back to the 40-day isolation period imposed in Europe in the 14th and 15th centuries for people suspected of having the plague. It first applied to ships coming from infected zones and then to travellers.

The 40-day isolation was then regularly adopted in Europe during epidemics, including the big cholera pandemic which hit the continent in the 1830s.

The word Fourteen-ine has emerged during the Covid-19 crisis and is based on the word quarantine.

The Covid-19 incubation period -- the time between infection and the appearance of symptoms -- is estimated at between one and 14 days, according to the World Health Organization.

Most governments around the world have imposed 14-day isolation periods for suspected cases. In some countries the period has been brought down to 10 or even seven days.

**- Social distancing, barrier gestures:**

These terms describe the measures people can take to reduce the risk of infection.

Wearing masks, regular hand washing, staying at least one metre away from others, not shaking hands or kissing to say hello and avoiding gatherings have all been recommended against Covid 19.

**- Super spreader:**

Refers to a person who has infected a large number of other people.

Unless protective measures such as isolation are taken, it is estimated that an infected person will transmit the illness to at least two or three other people. But in certain circumstances an infected person can infect dozens.

**- Vaccination:**

A medical procedure which consists of provoking an efficient immune reaction and thus giving protection against an infectious agent.

**- Virus:**

More simple micro-organisms than bacteria, which can cause disease. A multitude of viruses exist which play an essential role in the regulation of ecosystems on earth and in the oceans but can also cause serious infections. A virus is said to be "emerging" when it has just appeared in humans, as is the case of the coronavirus which is responsible for Covid-19.

**- World Health Organisation:**

The United Nations agency responsible for health. Founded in 1948, the international organisation based in Geneva aims to give the human race the highest level of health protection through action, prevention and medical surveillance programmes. The WHO is financed by its member states and by foundations. In 2018-2019 its two biggest contributors were the United States and the American Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

## Book traversal links for Epidemics in words


- ‹ Before Covid-19: Other deadly epidemics
- Up
- How epidemics impacted society ›