



The End of Plagues: The Global Battle Against Infectious Disease

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At the turn of the twentieth century, smallpox claimed the lives of two million people per year. By 1979, the disease had been eradicated and victory was declared across the globe. Yet the story of smallpox remains the exception, as today a host of deadly contagions, from polio to AIDS, continue to threaten human health around the world. Spanning three centuries, *The End of Plagues* weaves together the discovery of vaccination, the birth and growth of immunology, and the fight to eradicate the world's most feared diseases. From Edward Jenner's discovery of vaccination in 1796, to the early nineteenth-century foundling voyages in which chains of orphans, vaccinated one by one, were sent to colonies around the globe, to the development of polio vaccines and the stockpiling of smallpox as a biological weapon in the Cold War, world-renown immunologist John Rhodes charts our fight against these plagues, and shows how vaccinations gave humanity the upper hand. Today, aid groups including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Health Organization have made the eradication of polio a priority, and Rhodes takes us behind the scenes to witness how soon we may be celebrating the eradication of polio.

The End of Plagues: The Global Battle Against Infectious Disease Details

Date : Published September 24th 2013 by St. Martin's Press

ISBN : 9781137278524

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Format : Hardcover 256 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Science, History, Medical, Health, Medicine

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Rachel says

Although this book caught my eye and I was very interested, I have to say I was disappointed. The author does not keep a consistent chronology and the book gets very confusing as he's bouncing back and forth between years and occurrences. I got about half way through the book and just could not stay interested in it any longer. This is unfortunate because the book seemed very interesting and I'm sure the overall concept is, but this was not written well and makes it hard to keep things consist.

Angela says

Very informative. It provides a great look at smallpox and polio, along with immunology and virologists procedures over the years.

Ceri Gwyther says

Thought this was a good history of vaccinations. It was well written and easy to read as well as full of interesting facts.

Amber says

I received this book for free as part of the goodreads first reads giveaway. This book was really interesting, I enjoyed reading about the history of vaccination and the progress made in eliminating many of the worlds oldest known diseases. I would recommend this book to people wanting to learn more about the history of vaccination.

Jason Lewis says

An intriguing look into the progress of the vaccination methods and movements in the world. Rhodes gives both the resistances given at first by the many cultures throughout the years along with the results as each step is taken in global accomplishment against any infectious disease. Tough read as it bounces at times between time periods, but gives a very in-depth look at what all has changed throughout the world in vaccine progression.

Chris Demer says

This is a good book. It is an in-depth history of the development of vaccines, particularly those for smallpox and polio. The story of the discovery of variolation and later the use of cowpox by Jenner which led to the worldwide extinction of a major curse of mankind was well done, particularly the biographical information about Jenner.

Polio, while not extinct, has been mostly eradicated from developed countries and greatly reduced worldwide. The major players here were Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin. Salk developed a killed virus vaccine and not long after, Sabin developed an attenuated live virus vaccine which became the most commonly used. These two scientists had an ongoing debate about the benefits and costs of the two types. Eventually, it became clear that some real cases of polio were a result of the Sabin vaccine and the Salk vaccine is used primarily now.

Rhodes makes clear the extremely difficult drive to eradicate these two diseases- hundreds of thousands of workers, multiple organizations, countries, ethnicities, languages, cultures and religions- some of which provided roadblocks to vaccinators due to fears or philosophies. Recently, some vaccinators were killed in northern Afghanistan (or Pakistan-I don't recall which.)

Most young people today are not even aware of these diseases- and yet, smallpox (along with measles) was responsible for the decimation of Native Americans after contact with Europeans as they had no immunity. It was smallpox that allowed Cortez to conquer Mexico. Smallpox (*Variola major*) killed a large portion of those infected and left survivors scarred for life. Polio devastated young people, often killing, and more often leading to severe disability due to paralysis.

There was a time not so long ago, when there were hospital wards full of young patients in "iron Lungs" (external ventilators) due to paralysis of the muscles used for breathing.

I remember getting my smallpox vaccination- a vaccine no longer required. A also remember not being allowed to swim in the local pool because of a polio outbreak - and later getting the Salk (and also Sabin) vaccine in a mass vaccination effort.

These strides in medicine have saved millions of lives and tremendous suffering. Unfortunately, there are new and serious plagues, far from eradicated.

Ray Erickson says

I would like to have heard more about a couple of the topics covered in this book. Cholera is barely mentioned, plague is hardly mentioned, and there are a couple more that could have been covered more thoroughly, but overall a very solid work. Well written, interesting, and comprehensive.

Deena Scintilla says

Yea! I received as a GoodReads Giveaway and am just starting it.

A very good history of vaccine development. A lot of it was a review for me as a nurse, but I was surprised at how much new information I learned. This is not a fast read but it is written in such a manner that one does not have to have a medical background to understand or enjoy it.

I will be loaning this to a neighbor who is a retired chemist and has an interest in books on this subject.

William Nist says

For a book about human plagues, this is an entertaining and informative read. The history of immunology and vaccination is addressed beginning with Smallpox and ending with HIV. The story of the polio vaccines may be the most interesting, for there was an animosity between Drs Salk and Sabin, who each invented a different method of vaccination. So, if you are interested in the history of disease or some laymen-type info about how vaccinations actually work, this volume should be interesting to you.

Lisa Ahlstedt says

The End of Plagues takes a fascinating look at the never-ending human effort to eradicate our most feared diseases, from smallpox to AIDS. Quite a lot of the book details the remarkable work of Dr. Edward Jenner, a pioneer in the field of inoculation. It was interesting to read how the "ancient Chinese" were already practicing inoculation in the form of introducing dried smallpox into the noses of infants as a way to protect them from later developing the disease. Other cultures practiced similar forms of protection, but in England in the mid 18th century, tales of milkmaids who recovered from the mild "cowpox" becoming immune to smallpox were dismissed as folklore. Thank goodness Jenner practiced in a rural area where he was able to observe that there was some truth to that old wives tale! Later chapters deal with the attempts to fight tuberculosis, polio, influenza and HIV, and how international medical communities have banded together in an attempt to defeat these and other contagious diseases. A very informative and fascinating read, especially for people like me who lack a scientific background!

Anna says

Chapters were hit or miss, but overall this is a good, detailed history of the modern vaccine, and provides lots of solid information worth thinking about.

Kristy Oman says

I enjoy reading books in the genre of medical history and anything in the vein of infectious disease. I prefer books written in a linear chronology - parts of this book seemed to be written that way and then parts were sectioned by person or by virus/vaccine. It was confusing at parts when the author started jumping back and forth. Also a couple typos and misspellings; a personal pet peeve. Otherwise the subject matter was interesting although the bulk is focused on smallpox and polio. If you are expecting something more comprehensive I'd keep looking.
