Cholera Epidemics in the 19th Century

First appearing in Europe and No presumed to have come from Inc traveled around the world many killing many thousands. Causing and diarrhea, with dehydration so and the skin becomes deathlike a matter of hours. Because 19th-ce urban, political, and cultural life discussions of proper public health attempts to explain epidemic cho

Causes of Cholera

For much of the century, most Eu believed cholera was a locally pr brought about by direct exposure Climate and geographic location assumption that those who engage intemperate behavior or who had likely to get cholera when expose conditions. Observations that the urban slums, suffered from chole who were much differently house assertion. The germ theory, developed in the later 19th century, placed les factors, although the issue of individual predisposition and susceptibility du

Was Cholera Contagious?

For most of the 19th century, most scientists, physicians and sophisticated believed cholera was not contagious. The observation that a doctor could h contact with cholera patients without falling ill led to the conclusions that c transmitted from person to person. This was an accurate observation giver usually transmitted through contaminated drinking water, as John Snow fir in 1855.

Until Robert Koch identified the cholera bacillus in 1883, science continued anticontagionism. Leading anticontagionists or contingent contagionists inc Pettenkofer and Southwood Smith. According to the contingent contagionis
cholera could be contagious, but only under particular circumstances.

The existence of the cholera bacillus did not necessarily prove cholera’s cause—health measures often involved a blend of contagionist and anticontagionist theories. The International Sanitary Conferences, predecessor to the World Health Organization, was another important meeting. Quarantine, intimately related to contagion, was another issue of central concern to government officials and those involved in community health. There was no reason to submit to the significant personal and economic sacrifices involved in quarantine measures.

19th-Century Treatments

Despite the continued discussion about the cause of cholera, over the course of the 19th century, treatment of the disease did not change much. Patients with families were called, would use such characteristic treatments as bleeding or opium. Those without families might find themselves in grim places indeed during an epidemic. Preachers gave sermons on the moral implications of the disease for individuals and society. Riots ensued due to popular revolt against mass burials.

The Epidemics Subside

By the end of the 19th century, cholera epidemics no longer appeared in Europe. For this are uncertain, but standards of living had risen and many communities had established permanent boards of health. As part of the change, medical thought had changed in many ways as well. In 1831, most physicians agreed that cholera was a noncontagious miasmatic condition that favored the morally and physically corrupted. By the end of the 19th century, although the miasmatic interpretation still had influence, cholera was seen as a contagious disease caused by a particular microscopic organism.

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Selected Contagion Resources

This is a partial list of digitized materials available in Contagion: Historical Catalog and Full Text databases.

Web Pages

- Concepts of Contagion and Epidemics
- Humoral Theory
- Germ Theory
- International Sanitary Conferences
- James Jackson, 1777–1867
Robert Koch, 1843–1910
Medical Geography

Florence Nightingale, 1820–1910
Public Health

Rudolf Virchow, 1821–1902

Max von Pettenkofer, 1818–1901

Manuscripts

Papers of Samuel Leonard Abbot, 1867.

Papers of James Jackson, 1800–1867.

Papers of Abel Lawrence Peirson, 1812–1905.

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Reports, questionnaire, abstracts, etc. of the Massachusetts Medical Society, Suf

Publications

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Attending the Disease: Illustrated by a Map, Showing the Route and Progress of i
1817, to Great Britain, in 1831. New Haven: L.H. Young, 1832.

Broussais, F.J.V. Le Choléra Morbus Epidemique: Observé et Traité Selon la Mé
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1832. New Bedford?: 1832.

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Which Has Prevailed in India, and Which Has Travelled, Under That Name, from i
Official and Other Documents, Explanatory of the Nature, Treatment, and Preven


Was Cholera Contagious?

Epidemic Cholera: Its Mission and Mystery, Haunts and Havocs, Pathology and Ti
Contagion, the Influence of Fear, and Hurried and Delayed Interments. New York


"Ueber die Verbreitungsart der Cholera.” München: Cotta, 1855

Pettenkofer, Max von. Cholera: How to Prevent and Resist It. London: Baillière

http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/cholera.html

19th-Century Treatments


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