# Human case of bubonic plague in the UK confirmed as false alarm



Health officials in the United Kingdom recently confirmed that a reported human case of bubonic plague was a false alarm stemming from a mix-up with laboratory data. The error originated from a report by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) for the week ending March 13, which monitors infectious disease cases across England and Wales. According to the publication, the Sun, the UKHSA stated that the mix-up was due to a misallocation of data within the lab, and they are actively working to correct the mistake.

Bubonic plague, caused by the bacterium Yersinia pestis, is known for its historical impact, notably during the Black Death which devastated Europe in the 14th century, leading to the deaths of millions. As a point of concern, the plague is one of 24 infectious diseases listed as potential candidates for triggering the next global pandemic. It typically spreads through flea bites or contact with infected animals, and symptoms include fever, chills, headaches, muscle aches, and swollen lymph nodes, commonly known as “buboes.”

Currently, there are no licensed vaccines for the plague available in the UK. Nevertheless, scientists who contributed to the development of the Covid-19 vaccine are reportedly involved in efforts to create a vaccine for bubonic plague amid growing concerns about its potential re-emergence.

While the last major outbreak in the UK occurred in Suffolk in 1918, sporadic cases have been suspected since. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates there are between 1,000 and 2,000 cases of bubonic plague reported annually, particularly in regions of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. A recent case in the United States was noted last year in Oregon, where it was likely transmitted from an infected pet cat.

Professor Paul Hunter, a medicine expert at the University of East Anglia, highlighted that instances of bubonic plague do occur occasionally, with most cases reported in individuals coming into close contact with wild rodents, typically while travelling abroad. He noted the importance of maintaining distance from even seemingly harmless wild animals, as the disease is primarily spread by fleas.

Despite the historical perception of bubonic plague as a deadly disease, antibiotics have made it highly treatable today. However, there remain serious risks; without timely antibiotic treatment, the infection can develop into septicemic or pneumonic plague, both of which can be significantly more lethal, with untreated cases having a fatality rate of up to 90% within a week of onset.

As health officials continue to monitor infectious diseases, there are indications that emerging viruses have the potential to cause future pandemics, with particular concerns raised about a novel measles-like virus that could outpace containment efforts.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notifiable-diseases-causative-agents-reports-for-2025/noids-causative-agents-week-12-week-ending-23-march-2025> - This source confirms that laboratories in England are required to notify the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) of the identification of Yersinia pestis, the causative agent of bubonic plague, supporting the claim about the agency's role in monitoring infectious diseases.
* <https://aphascience.blog.gov.uk/2025/03/25/disease-emergency-response-in-action/> - This article discusses the rapid response needed when dealing with notifiable diseases, such as bubonic plague, and supports the claims regarding the UK's health infrastructure in handling infectious disease outbreaks.
* <https://geographical.co.uk/news/black-death-the-next-global-pandemic> - This magazine article discusses the ongoing development of a vaccine for bubonic plague and emphasizes the public health concerns regarding its potential re-emergence, corroborating the article's mention of vaccine development efforts.
* <https://www.mass.gov/guide-to-evidence/article-xi-miscellaneous> - While this source is more about legal aspects, it connects to the importance of evidence in health crises, indirectly supporting the need for accurate reporting and response to infectious diseases such as the plague.
* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/plague> - This World Health Organization fact sheet provides information on bubonic plague, including symptoms, modes of transmission, and global case statistics, supporting the article's details about the disease's characteristics and historical context.