

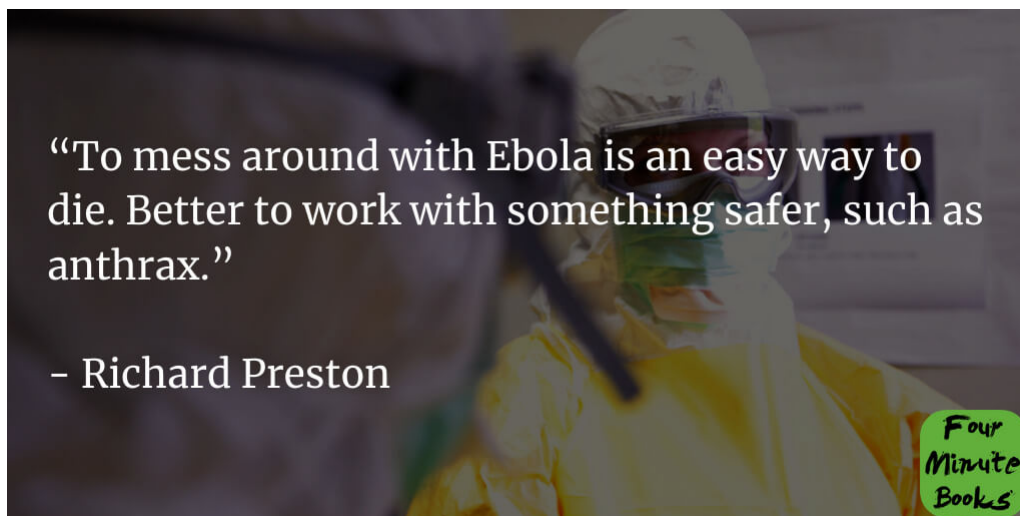
The Hot Zone Summary



1-Sentence-Summary: *The Hot Zone* is Richard Preston's version of a terrifying true story of how the Ebola virus came to be, why it's so deadly and contagious, and how this all reveals our massive vulnerabilities and inefficiencies when it comes to fending off pandemics of all kinds.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



As of writing this summary, the world is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the deadly virus rages on and we grapple with the loss of life, we can learn from looking to other disease outbreaks the world has seen previously.

You may recall the panic around Ebola outbreaks in West Africa in 2014. Governments restricted international travel, closed borders, and built isolation units. The fear surrounding it was for good reason. Ebola is an extremely deadly and highly contagious virus.

In *The Hot Zone: The Terrifying True Story of the Origins of the Ebola Virus* by Richard Preston, we get an intense real-life look into the terrifying Ebola virus. You'll learn where it came from, how we were able to halt its spread for now, and where it could spread next. Most importantly, we can learn how to apply the lessons we learned from Ebola to make sure it doesn't progress to a worldwide pandemic.

Let's see how much we can discover in just 3 lessons:

1. If you get Ebola it can liquefy your organs, make you lose a lot of blood, and will almost certainly kill you.
2. Ebola likely came from one cave in Africa after tourists died after visiting it.
3. The threat of a pandemic, whether from Ebola or otherwise, is always looming over us, and our way of life makes us extremely vulnerable to outbreaks.

Curious what a virus that's worse than COVID-19 can do? Let's dive right in and find out!

Lesson 1: Your chances of survival aren't great if you get Ebola, which liquefies your organs.

Ebola was first discovered in 1976 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since the first outbreak, many others followed that have shown just how deadly this virus is. Around half of all those who contract the virus will die.

Ebola attacks the cells and essentially liquifies tissues and even organs. As the brain liquefies, it changes the way the person behaves and shuts down necessary brain functions. Its victims also suffer from blood loss which sometimes is the cause of death.

Pretty scary sounding, right? **And to make matters worse, it isn't just very deadly, it's also very contagious.** Part of the reason it spreads easily is because of its long incubation period of seven days. This means that an infected person can unknowingly spread the disease for seven days before having any symptoms themselves.

It is also dangerous because of the way it spreads. Ebola is spread through bodily fluids, and the illness causes profuse bleeding, vomiting, and diarrhea, making caring for someone with it very risky. Just one single drop of blood can carry more than enough virus particles to infect another person.

Lesson 2: One African cave may be the source of the Ebola virus.

So where did it come from? Evidence suggests that it may originate from a cave called Kitum Cave in Kenya. In 1980, a man became ill and died of Ebola shortly after visiting the cave. Years later, a young boy visiting the cave with his family also contracted the disease.

When scientists sensed a pattern, they went to the cave to investigate. The research was inconclusive. However, they believed it was very likely it could be the source because the cave is full of bat droppings, which are believed to carry the virus. It also has many sharp rocks, giving the potential for the virus to enter into a victim's cuts or scratches.

However, this book was written before scientists discovered bats of the same species found in Kitum Cave in a different nearby cave that carried the Ebola virus. This made Kitum Cave the likely site of Ebola's start.

Another possibility the author presents for where it originated is in animal holding facilities. One known outbreak was found in monkeys in a holding facility in Reston, Virginia. The close quarters of monkeys in the environment makes it relatively easy for the virus to jump from animal to animal.

This is particularly dangerous for places that hold monkeys of different species. Keeping monkeys of different species close would give the virus ample opportunity to adapt and jump from one species to another. This would make it more likely to infect humans eventually.

Lesson 3: Our society makes it easy for a pandemic to strike, and we are always vulnerable, whether from Ebola or otherwise.

The good news is that we have learned better techniques for containing Ebola outbreaks over the years. We have designed better equipment to protect workers and put better quarantine practices in place.

The bad news is that the threat is not gone. Ebola still exists, and since this book was written there have been a few major outbreaks as recent as 2014. We have a lot to learn about the virus, but we do know that it can adapt and mutate quickly, making it very dangerous.

There is evidence that some of the forms this virus comes in actually can be spread through airborne transmission. It's frightening to imagine a disease like this being as easy to catch as the common cold.

We have a lot to learn about it if we want to prevent future outbreaks. For example, scientists aren't even totally positive about how it spreads. There have been cases of people who got it who weren't even exposed to an infected individual. On the other hand, there have been people who have accidentally come in direct contact with the blood of an infected person and didn't get it.

Scientists are not sure why this is. It's important that we continue to research this disease because it still remains an aggressive threat.

The Hot Zone Review

The Hot Zone made me go "what the heck?!" a whole lot more than I thought it would, especially considering how COVID-19 has been going recently! I also was excited to read something by Richard Preston because he co-authored one of my favorite books with Michael Crichton. This true story is going to have you on the edge of your seat the whole time, and maybe even a little afraid based on recent world events!

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Who would I recommend The Hot Zone summary to?

The 57-year-old politician who isn't concerned enough about our preparations for a pandemic, the 34-year-old who wonders about the other viruses out there that are more dangerous than COVID-19, and anybody that wants to learn more about how we can fight deadly diseases like Ebola.

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