

公衆衛生

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Video 1: The Greatest Threat to Humanity

Infectious diseases pose the biggest threat to humankind. Even now, the new coronavirus continues to spread around the world. It is no exaggeration to say that human history has been a battle against infectious diseases.

Of the numerous infectious diseases that humans have suffered from, the plague, smallpox, and the Spanish flu were especially brutal, claiming many lives. The Spanish flu, which lasted from 1918 to 1920, is said to have killed around 50 million people in the world in less than three years. Even more serious, the smallpox pandemic in the 16th century is said to have taken the lives of up to 55 million people in the Americas. However, the plague pandemic, lasting from 1347 to 1352, was the most serious pandemic in human history. It is said to have killed as many as 200 million people in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Video 2: Fighting the Plague

The plague that struck Europe during the 14th century is considered one of the worst infectious diseases in human history. The death rate was high; the plague killed about one-third of the population in Europe.

Why did so many people die? Because medical science at the time could not explain the cause of the disease, so people acted on misinformation. As a result, infection spread from person to person, and then from region to region.

How did the people of the 14th century fight the plague? In Italy, quarantine was carried out. Ships had to anchor off the coast for 40 days. They were not allowed to dock until it was confirmed that there were no sick people on board. In addition, guidelines were established for isolating and treating plague patients. Isolation facilities were set up for them on two islands near the port city of Venice. When they recovered, they were transferred to a rest home where they stayed until they were completely cured and could be discharged.

Currently, people arriving in Japan from overseas need to quarantine for a certain period, and those who are infected are required to be isolated or to self-isolate. Measures applied in the 14th and 21st centuries are quite similar.

Video 3: How Smallpox Destroyed a Civilization

Smallpox is a disease that has changed the course of history many times. One thing it did was cause the fall of the Inca Empire.

This empire of 16 million people dominated the western part of present-day South America. In the 15th century, the empire was flourishing. However, in the early 1500s, an army of 200 Spaniards arrived, looking for gold. They faced an army of 80,000 Incans, but they were able to conquer the Inca Empire in a very short time.

How was this possible? One of the main reasons was smallpox. This disease had been brought to other areas of the Americas by the Spanish, who were already immune to it. When the fighting between the armies began, smallpox was already raging through the Inca Empire, and the population was being severely reduced. Thus, the Spanish were easily able to conquer the Incas.

Video 4: The Spanish Flu Pandemic

About 100 years ago, the Spanish flu swept around the world as the First World War came to an end. This pandemic killed more than 40 million people, which was more than all the lives that had been lost in the war.

Japan was no exception. The virus entered the country with travelers and cargo arriving at Japan's ports, including Kobe, Moji, and Osaka. It then spread by railway to other cities. About 40% of Japan's population became infected. The Spanish flu killed between 380,000 and 450,000 people out of the country's total population of 56 million. The death rate in the flu's second wave was over four times higher than that in the first wave. It's speculated that the virus had become deadlier by the second wave.

Video 5: Measures Taken by the Japanese Government

As infection spread, the Japanese government urged the public to take preventive measures. Posters were distributed throughout the country that showed invisible infection routes with red dashed lines and provided guidelines for coughing safely. Hygiene measures such as gargling and wearing a mask were also recommended. It is said that these practices took root in Japan during the Spanish flu.

Over 100 years have passed since the Spanish flu pandemic, but the way infectious diseases spread and the measures we take to prevent them remain almost the same.