

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

I am a gamer, and though I mostly play tabletop strategy games, card games do sneak in at times. Gamers in general have a somewhat morbid streak which either reflects or is reflected by the themes in some of the games we play. I remember a popular card game from the 90s called Black Death. In this game, you try to shelter your own population from pestilence and doom while striving to eliminate the masses of your opponents.

The Black Death, also called the plague, is best known as a historical wave of disease which swept through Europe and Asia in the mid-1300s. It took the lives of about 200 MILLION people in less than seven years. That's thought to be more than one out of three people in the world at that time.

It's interesting to note that established medical opinion declared the cause was a conjunction of three planets in early 1345 making the air "bad." These days we have a better-established theory, involving blood-drinking fleas who spread plague-causing bacteria from animal carriers to human hosts. Once humans are infected, the disease becomes a form of pneumonia. Then every time a carrier sneezes, coughs, or even exhales weakly, a cloud of pestilence waves out, seeking new bodies to breathe them in.

Outbreaks have been fairly regular, though the rediscovery of good hygiene after the middle ages did a lot to keep them smaller in scale. Since the discovery of antibiotics, survival rates have climbed; and only about 400 cases have been seen in North America since the end of World War Two. That may not sound like many, but places like Madagascar see at least that number of cases every year.

Why should we care here in Northern California? Our modern transportation system means that every outbreak of any disease, be it viral or bacterial, should be of concern to us. The jump from a local pandemic to a global one just takes one person who thinks they have a mild flu hopping on an airplane and exposing everyone they come into contact with onboard and at the airports.

Fortunately, plague isn't terribly catching, but it's deadly enough we should be aware when the World Health Organization issues warnings about it. Which they did last week, putting nine east African countries on alert that the current outbreak in Madagascar is expected to spread.

While we may not worry too much about the plague, autumn in this part of the world brings with it a host of illnesses that none of us wants to have. Everything from the “common” cold to various strains of influenza to the infamous Humboldt Crud threatens the health and happiness of all of us.

While none of this should induce panic, it should induce prevention! Don’t put yourself out there to catch whatever is going around. And if you’ve become a carrier of anything contagious, PLEASE keep it to yourself! It’s not that hard to do!

Follow basic precautions. Wash your hands frequently, using hot water and soap. When you cough or sneeze, use a tissue or your elbow. Don’t sneeze on your palm, wipe it on your jeans, then shake someone’s hand. Get plenty of rest, drink plenty of water, and eat healthy to stay healthy. Most importantly: If you are sick, stay home or seek medical attention. Don’t go out into the world. Spreading the plague may be a fun game, but in real life it’s a killer.

Grace and peace to you. This is Lt. Roger McCort for the KINS Community Comment.