

Summary

- By c1900, the treatment and prevention of disease had changed. This was due to an improved understanding of the cause of disease.
- More hospitals were built, making treatments more widely available.
- Hospitals were cleaner and built to provide a space for recovery, thanks to the work of Florence Nightingale. Nursing had become a respectable profession.
- Herbal and patent remedies were still popular for common illnesses, because few new treatments had been developed.
- Surgical procedures had become a more effective method of treatment as a result of the development of anaesthetics and antiseptics. However, blood loss was still a problem, so surgeons still had to work quickly.
- Scientists had developed a method for vaccinating people against diseases and had begun to develop vaccines for particular illnesses.
- One of these illnesses was smallpox – Edward Jenner proved that catching cowpox prevented people from catching smallpox.
- In the 19th century, the government began to take action to improve public health in cities. This was a result of a better understanding of the link between dirty conditions and disease and it led to a healthier population.

Checkpoint

Strengthen

- S1** What changes and continuities had there been in the treatment of disease by c1900?
- S2** Describe the actions that Florence Nightingale took to improve hospital conditions in Britain.
- S3** Identify the steps that led to improvements in surgical treatment during the 19th century.
- S4** Create a flow diagram to show the different stages in the way people dealt with smallpox, in the period c1700–c1900.
- S5** What were the short-term and long-term impacts of Jenner's new method of preventing smallpox?

Challenge

- C1** As in the previous period (c1500–c1700), attitudes in society had a big impact on change in treatment. Can you list three ways that people's attitudes encouraged developments in treatment and prevention, and three ways that they held them back?
- C2** Compare this list to the one you made at the end of Section 2.2. Had people's attitudes changed or stayed the same between these two periods? Explain your answer, using examples from the text where possible. If you are not confident about any of these questions, form a group with other students, discuss the answers and then record your conclusions. Your teacher can give you some hints.

Learning outcomes

- Understand how the government tackled the cholera epidemics of the 19th century.

Source A

This cartoon was drawn in 1852, for the magazine *Punch*.



A COURT FOR KING CHOLERA.

Fighting cholera

Cholera was a terrible disease. It caused diarrhoea and sickness that became so bad, the victim would become dehydrated*. It was usually fatal: sufferers would die between two and six days after falling sick. As the sufferer became dehydrated, their blood would become thicker, rupturing blood vessels under the skin. This turned the skin blue, so cholera was nicknamed 'the blue death'. It was spread through person-to-person contact, or water contaminated with the faeces of a sufferer.

Cholera did not arrive in Britain until 1831. It spread quickly across the country. It arrived in London in February 1832 and there were 5,275 deaths in the city by the end of the year. Cholera mainly affected the poorest people. There were lots of cases in slum dwellings, as well as in workhouses, prisons and asylums. However, wealthier districts were not immune. As had been the case with the plague two centuries earlier, doctors found it impossible to treat. There were three further severe epidemics across the country in the following decades.

Key term

Dehydrated*

When the body does not have enough water to keep the organs working properly.

Activity ?

Look carefully at the cartoon. List all the threats to health you can see in the picture.