

FINAL - JUNE 27, 2025

**History of Public Health (HILD 30GS)
Summer Session I - Edinburgh, Scotland
Professor Claire Edington**

Class meeting time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

Location: Seminar Room 5, Chrystal Macmillan Building, University of Edinburgh

Professor Edington's contact info:

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Office hours: 1:30-3 pm Tuesdays (in the University of Library café) or by appointment; I can also answer quick questions before or after class.

Ever since classical antiquity, people have sought to understand why epidemics happen. How does disease travel? What might explain why one person or group of people become sick and others do not? Does the state have a duty to protect the health of the public, even if that interferes with the rights of individuals? This history is vast, and students tend to learn about the triumphs and turning points that characterize the experience of Western societies, to the exclusion of other parts of the world. Rather than attempt to cover every possible topic, this course instead pursues a global history of epidemics in order to introduce students to the major shifts, themes and tensions that have animated historical scholarship about public health on a global scale. In particular, it will center the histories of Scotland, Britain and its empire, taking advantage of the rich history of scientific discovery in Edinburgh.

Why focus on epidemics? First, as highly visible, dramatic events, epidemics capture the public's imagination and provoke immediate, widespread response. They intensify fears about the threats posed by social outsiders and thereby reinforce hegemonic notions of citizenship, race and belonging. They also ignite periods of disruption that cause social norms to be rewritten, in terms of who gets to participate in the creation of knowledge and who benefits from that knowledge. In short, epidemics generate responses which both reflect and remake our social worlds. Second, epidemics draw our attention to the global expansion of disease through warfare, international trade and colonial conquest. Tracing the globalization of epidemic disease demonstrates how different parts of the world became connected through the movement of germs, people, ideas, and technology. It opens a window onto how different cultural understandings of health and illness came to interact and transform as a result of that interaction. It helps us to understand how colonial power became projected through the language and practices of public health, and also resisted. Finally, attending to the global nature of epidemic disease exposes the shared challenges and shifting geopolitics that have characterized the rise of the field of international, and later global, health.

As recent events have made clear, we are continually confronted by epidemics of new diseases for which we do not have the adequate knowledge or tools to combat them. Meanwhile, even when we do have the tools to mitigate harm in ongoing health crises, those solutions do not always reach those most at risk. This class will help make sense of where these public health tools

came from, and why these global health disparities persist. It will provide a historical account of how societies have explained and confronted epidemics in the past—from the Plague of Athens to Covid-19—and what we can learn from these experiences moving forward.

Learning Objectives. At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- 1) **Describe** the relationship between epidemics and warfare, colonial empires, the rise of the modern state and the growth of global trade networks in world history;
- 2) **Identify** the social, political and cultural factors that have shaped responses to epidemics over time;
- 3) **Think and write like historians** by engaging with both primary texts and reading seminal works in the field. Students will also learn how to ask good historical questions and to write well-reasoned, persuasive, empirically sound, essays;
- 4) **Evaluate** how our understanding of the past can be used as a tool for thinking about the future direction of policy.

Grade breakdown.

Class Attendance and Participation. (15%).

Attendance and participation are mandatory. Please arrive on time and prepared to discuss the readings and engage with your classmates. We will do a combination of general and small group discussion. If you cannot make class due to illness or emergency, please let Professor Edington know ahead of time.

Reading Quizzes. (20% total)

You will be asked to complete a short quiz related to the readings for each class meeting. You must complete the quiz by midnight *before* class (ie Monday and Wednesday evenings). There is no quiz before the first day of class. No trick questions, the point is to make sure you've grasped the fundamental talking points of the readings which will be the basis of our class lecture and discussion. It will involve a variety of true/false and multiple choice questions. Each quiz will also include one open response questions which will ask you to write a short response related to the reading (these will be graded on a sliding scale of 0-3 points). You will have 9 quizzes total. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped from your final grade.

Final Group Project. (30% total)

For your final group project, I will ask you to make a digital, interactive map of the history of medicine and public health in Edinburgh. The idea is that you will associate certain

historical events or actors [epidemics, public health policies, medical discoveries, the lives of individual people – both famous and not] with a specific physical location in the city. I will ask you to pin the site to a digital map and include links to images (both from today and in the past, if available) and other archival sources (such as reports, memoirs, newspaper clippings, posters, multimedia, etc). For each chosen site, I will ask you to write one essay (1000-1200 words) providing background context and remarking on its historical significance. This is an opportunity to great creative, get out into the city, and put words and images together while also demonstrating core skills in historical research, analysis and writing.

Each essay must include references to at least one primary source (derived from the period under study), at least two secondary sources written by historians, at least one class lecture/assigned reading, and a contemporary photograph of the site (a historical photo would be great too!). While you are writing a local history, I would also like you to use the essay as an opportunity to situate Edinburgh within a broader global history of public health and epidemics.

You will be evaluated on the quality and depth of the research, the clarity of the writing, and the overall final impression of the map. Your total grade for the assignment is based on your individual essay grade (75%) and overall group grade (25%). Students will also be asked at the end of the course to evaluate their individual contributions and to reflect on their group participation.

More information about the assignment will be shared the first week of class.

Final Exam (35%).

The final exam will be held in-person on Thursday, July 31st following class and a one hour break for lunch (from 1-3 pm). Students are allowed to bring a “cheat sheet” to the exam – one piece of paper – double-sided, handwritten or typed notes, to assist with the exam. The exam will consist of several ID terms, one short essay and one long essay.

Policies.

Academic Honesty.

All written material must be the original work of the student. Any words and ideas that are taken from the work of others must be cited appropriately. The use of Chat GPT or any other AI program to assist in formulating or structuring your ideas, writing prose, or fixing grammar is expressly forbidden. If you find yourself struggling with any of these things, please seek out Professor Edington during office hours for help! My job is to support you in becoming a stronger analytic thinker and reader of academic texts and a more confident writer.

Any student found in violation of these course policies will receive a 0 and face disciplinary action. For more information on University policies, please visit the Academic Integrity Office's website at: <http://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/>

Deadlines and expectations.

Because of the compressed summer schedule, all deadlines are firm. You must complete all the assignments and attend all the field trips in order to receive a passing grade in the class. If you are experiencing a medical or family emergency, please let me know as soon as possible so we can get you the support you need and work out an alternative schedule, if needed.

In general, more communication is better! I'm here to help and support you, but I can't do that if I don't know if there's a problem.

**** All readings will be available on the Canvas course site under each weekly module. You are not required to purchase any textbooks for this class. Dates on the Calendar indicate the day that the reading is due.**

Please make sure you know how to access the VPN in order to access all online library resources. **

Calendar.

Week 1.

Tuesday, July 1. Covid-19 and the Anti-Lessons of History.

Robert Peckham. "COVID-19 and the Anti-Lessons of History" *The Lancet*. Published online March 2, 2020.

Guest Lecturer: Niki Vermeulen, Professor, Science, Technology and Innovation Studies, University of Edinburgh, on the "Curious Edinburgh" project

**** Remember - your first quiz must be submitted by 11:59 pm on Wed, July 2nd ****

Thursday, July 3. What is an epidemic? The Plague of Athens and Hippocratic medicine.

Primary sources: Excerpts from Hippocrates. *Airs, Waters, Places*; Thucydides, "The Plague of Athens" from *The History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Week 2.

Tuesday, July 8. The Black Death: Europe and the Ottoman World.

Guy Geltner, "The Path to Pistoia: Urban Hygiene before the Black Death," *Past & Present* 246 (February 2020): 3-33.

176- Nukhet Varlik, "The plague that never left: restoring the Second Pandemic to Ottoman and Turkish history in the time of Covid-19" *New Perspectives on Turkey* no. 62 (2020): 189.

Primary source: Health ordinances of Pistoia (1348).

Excursion: Isle of Skye – Wednesday, July 10th to Friday, July 12th.
Note – no class on Thursday, July 11th

Week 3.

Tuesday, July 15. Slavery, race and medicine in the British Atlantic.

Rana Hogarth. The Myth of Innate Racial Differences Between White and Black People's Bodies: Lessons from the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. *American Journal of Public Health* (2019) 109,10: 1339-1342.

Primary source: Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People during the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793 and A refutation of some censures, thrown upon them in some late Publications. (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1794.)

Listen to podcast: "How Slavery and War shaped Epidemiology" with Dr. Jim Downs

Excursion: Special Collections, University of Edinburgh Libraries – Tuesday, July 15th at 1:30 pm

Thursday, July 17. Mapping Cholera in 19th Century Britain and Its Empire.

Pamela K. Gilbert. "The Victorian Social Body and Urban Cartography" in *Imagined Londons* State University of New York Press, 2002.

Pratik Chakrabarti, "Curing Cholera: Pathogens, Places and Poverty in South Asia," *International Journal of South Asian Studies* 3 (December 2010): 153-168.

Alexandre IR White. "Historical linkages: epidemic threat, economic risk and xenophobia." In *The Lancet* 2020 18-24 April; 395 (10232): 1250-1251.

Excursion: Leith Links Tour, Thursday, July 17th at 2:30 pm.

Week 4.

Tuesday, July 22. Visualizing the tropics and the birth of tropical medicine.

Robert Peckham, "Chapter 6: Matched Laboratory: Colonies, Cultures and Bacteriology" in *Imperial Contagions, Medicine, Hygiene and Cultures of Planning in Asia*.
Robert

Peckham and David M. Pomfret, eds. Hong Kong University Press, 2003.

Abhijit Sarkar, "Reflexive Gaze and Constructed Meanings: Photographs of Plague Hospitals in Colonial Bombay" in *Plague Image and Imagination from Medieval to Modern Times* C. Lynteris (ed). (2021)

Primary sources: Visual Representations of the Third Plague Pandemic.
<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/collections/da176b25-7739-462a-b18a-72eed4ddf313>

Guest lecture: Sudeepa Abeysinghe, Senior Lecturer in Global Health Policy, University of Edinburgh.

Excursion: Royal Botanic Gardens – Tuesday, July 22nd at 2:00 pm

Thursday, July 24. Eradication and the end of epidemic disease?: international health in the postwar era

Nancy Leys Stepan. "Chapter 6: Could we/should we eradicate mosquitoes? The case of the yellow fever vector" (pp. 73-86) in *Mosquitopia: The Places of Pests in a Healthy World*.

Taylor and Francis, September 2021.

Dora Vargha. Between East and West: Polio Vaccination Across the Iron Curtain in Cold War Hungary. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 88,2 (Summer 2014): 319-342.

Primary source: Alma Alta Declaration (1978).

Guest lecture: Lukas Engelmann, Senior Lecturer in Science, Technology and Innovation Studies, University of Edinburgh

Week 5.

Tuesday, July 29th. HIV/AIDS, the global movement for treatment access, and the return of epidemics.

Mandisa Mbali, "South African AIDS activism: lessons for high-impact global health advocacy" in *Routledge Handbook on the Politics of Global Health*. Routledge (2018).

Kavita Sivaramakrishnan, "The return of epidemics and the politics of global-local health," *American Journal of Public Health* 101,6 (June 2011): 1032-1041.

Thursday, July 31st. Covid and the future of public health.

P. Wenzel Geissler and Ruth J. Prince. "Layers of epidemic: Present pasts during the first weeks of COVID-19 in Western Kenya." *Centaurus* (published online 27 July 2020).

Simukai Chugudu. "From Cholera to Corona: the politics of plagues in Africa." Available online: <https://africasacountry.com/2020/03/from-cholera-to-corona-the-politics-of-plagues-in-africa>.

Final Exam – Thursday afternoon (1 pm-3 pm)