

Death of worker at plague lab raises concerns

8th October 2026



The USA has raised concerns after a worker at a plague research laboratory in Siberia died. Some newspapers suspect that she died after coming into contact with plague bacteria. The 28-year-old worker died after

developing severe pneumonia. Local reports say she may have broken a test tube containing plague bacteria. Dozens of hospital workers have been quarantined. Officials are monitoring people who were in contact with the woman who died. Russia has said the woman's death was from "pneumonia of an unknown origin" and not plague. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said there was no "cause for alarm". He said officials should "keep an eye on it".

Pneumonic plague can be deadly. It attacks the lungs and can cause death 18 to 24 hours after symptoms begin. It is highly contagious, so it can spread quickly. It can move from person to person through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The disease can be treated with antibiotics. However, antibiotics work best when they are given as soon as symptoms appear. Pneumonic plague is different from COVID-19, which is caused by a virus and not a bacterium. COVID-19 spreads much more easily around the world than plague. Microbiologist Dr Simon Clarke told the BBC: "Pneumonic plague can spread from person to person, and that is why there is the concern around this."

Sources: dw.com / bbc.com / independent.co.uk

Writing

We should kill all harmful bacteria kept in laboratories. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

raising concerns / plague / laboratory / bacteria / pneumonia / cause for alarm / lungs / symptoms / contagious / coughs / sneezes / antibiotics / COVID-19 / virus

True / False

- 1) A woman died in an accident in her house in Siberia. T / F
- 2) The article says the woman who died cut her finger on a test tube. T / F
- 3) Russia said it is not sure where the pneumonia is from. T / F
- 4) The US secretary of state is worried about eye damage from the plague. T / F
- 5) Pneumonic plague can kill 18 hours after symptoms begin. T / F
- 6) Pneumonic plague only spreads through touching other people. T / F
- 7) Antibiotics can treat the plague if they are used quickly. T / F
- 8) A microbiologist said the plague spreads faster than COVID-19. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| 1. concerns | a. cured |
| 2. suspect | b. very bad |
| 3. severe | c. fear |
| 4. origin | d. catching |
| 5. alarm | e. pass on |
| 6. deadly | f. worries |
| 7. contagious | g. source |
| 8. treated | h. signs |
| 9. symptoms | i. think |
| 10. spread | j. lethal |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) How scary does pneumonic plague sound?
- c) What do you remember about COVID-19?
- d) What are the differences between bacteria and viruses?
- e) What would you do if there was another pandemic?
- f) Do you think there will be another pandemic?
- g) What three adjectives best describe this story?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the researchers?

Phrase Match

1. The USA has raised
 2. she died after coming into contact
 3. she may have broken a test
 4. Dozens of hospital workers
 5. officials should keep an
 6. It attacks the lungs and can cause
 7. It is highly
 8. when an infected person coughs
 9. caused by a virus and
 10. that is why there is the concern
- a. have been quarantined
 - b. not a bacterium
 - c. concerns
 - d. or sneezes
 - e. death 18 to 24 hours
 - f. with plague bacteria
 - g. eye on it
 - h. around this
 - i. tube
 - j. contagious

Discussion – Student B

- a) What do you know about this story?
- b) How worried are you about this story?
- c) What do you know about the plague?
- d) Would you work with dangerous bacteria?
- e) What do you know about pneumonia?
- f) Do you think this news is cause for alarm?
- g) How strictly should officials keep an eye on this case?
- h) Do you worry about bacteria being used by terrorists?

Spelling

1. a worker at a plague research yrtalarobo
2. newspapers tuscpe that she died
3. after developing veeres pneumonia
4. people who were in aoccttn with the woman
5. there was no cause for almar
6. caliisfof should keep an eye on it
7. Pneumonic plague can be aledyd
8. It attacks the nusgl
9. 24 hours after omsytspm begin
10. an infected person oschgu or sneezes
11. caused by a rsuiv
12. COVID-19 arsepds much more easily

Answers – Synonym Match

1. f	2. i	3. b	4. g	5. c
6. j	7. d	8. a	9. h	10. e

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	ppppp
2.	ppppp
3.	ppppp
4.	ppppp
5.	ppppp
6.	ppppp
7.	ppppp
8.	ppppp
9.	ppppp
10.	ppppp

Speaking – Harmful things

Rank these with your partner. Put the most harmful things at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Bacteria
- Poisons
- Radiation
- Animals
- Chemicals
- Natural disasters
- Climate change
- AI

Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	T	4	F	5	T	6	F	7	T	8	F
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.