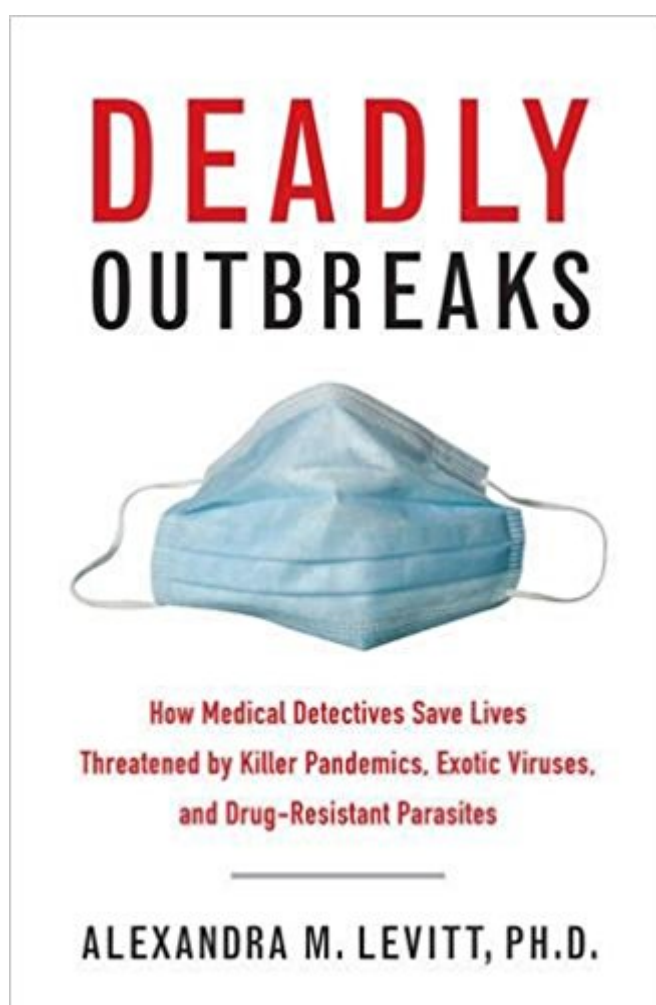


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Deadly Outbreaks: How Medical Detectives Save Lives Threatened By Killer Pandemics, Exotic Viruses, And Drug-Resistant Parasites



Synopsis

Despite advances in health care, infectious microbes continue to be a formidable adversary to scientists and doctors. Vaccines and antibiotics, the mainstays of modern medicine, have not been able to conquer infectious microbes because of their amazing ability to adapt, evolve, and spread to new places. Terrorism aside, one of the greatest dangers from infectious disease we face today is from a massive outbreak of drug-resistant microbes. *Deadly Outbreaks* recounts the scientific adventures of a special group of intrepid individuals who investigate these outbreaks around the world and figure out how to stop them. Part homicide detective, part physician, these medical investigators must view the problem from every angle, exhausting every possible source of contamination. Any data gathered in the field must be stripped of human sorrows and carefully analyzed into hard statistics. Author Dr. Alexandra Levitt is an expert on emerging diseases and other public health threats. Here she shares insider accounts she's collected that go behind the alarming headlines we've seen in the media: mysterious food poisonings, unexplained deaths at a children's hospital, a strange neurologic disease afflicting slaughterhouse workers, flocks of birds dropping dead out of the sky, and drug-resistant malaria running rampant in a refugee camp. Meet the resourceful investigators—doctors, veterinarians, and research scientists—and discover the truth behind these cases and more.

Book Information

Hardcover: 192 pages

Publisher: Skyhorse Publishing; 1 edition (September 1, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1626360359

ISBN-13: 978-1626360358

Product Dimensions: 6 x 6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #324,944 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Basic Sciences > Parasitology #28 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Infectious Disease > Parasitology #150 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Infectious Diseases

Customer Reviews

Always be ready for the unexpected could be a motto for epidemiologists. And the unexpected

might be a link between lots of dead birds and a cluster of patients with encephalitis, or a connection between the brains of slaughtered hogs and multiple employees experiencing muscle weakness. Levitt reviews seven medical mysteries that appeared between 1976 and 2007 and reports on the lessons learned. Some of these outbreaks are familiar: Legionnaires' disease in Philadelphia in 1976, hantavirus in the Four Corners region in 1993, and West Nile virus in New York City in 1999. Other difficult-to-solve cases described in the book include a salmonella scare due to contaminated ice cream in Minnesota, drug-resistant malaria in a Cambodian refugee camp, suspicious deaths in a Toronto children's hospital, and progressive inflammatory neuropathy (nerve damage) afflicting workers in a Minnesota meatpacking plant. Levitt, a scientist with the Centers for Disease Control, portrays epidemiologists as disease detectives who tirelessly hunt for clues and excel at deductive reasoning. Even Sherlock Holmes would be proud of this astute group of professionals.

--Tony Miksanek

Alexandra Levitt has produced a wonderfully crafted series of stories on how real-world epidemiologists practice the art and science of disease outbreak detection, investigation, and response. ... Anyone with even a passing interest in disease investigation will find *Deadly Outbreaks* to be a great read. - Stephen Ostroff, M.D., Former Deputy Director, National Center for Infectious Diseases, CDC and Former Director, Bureau of Epidemiology, Pennsylvania Department of Health

This terrific book allows us to experience 'shoe-leather' epidemiology at its very best. From the extraordinary detection of West Nile Virus in New York City to the control of drug-resistant malaria in the tropics, this endlessly fascinating book explores the world of epidemiologists at the front line in the global war against outbreaks, pandemics, and never-before-seen deadly pathogens. ... This is an extraordinary read! - Matt Boulton, M.D., M.P.H., Professor of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, University of Michigan, School of Public Health

These are gripping, suspenseful stories that are exceptionally well-written and highly instructive. Public health practitioners and students will benefit from the hard-won victories of epidemiologists described here, and in my opinion, one can hardly hope to learn important lessons for the future in a more enjoyable way. ... This volume is in the finest proud tradition of Paul de Kruif's *Microbe Hunters* (1926)... and Berton Roueché's *Eleven Blue Men* (1953). - Don Hopkins, M.D., M.P.H., Vice President of Health Programs at The Carter Center (from the Foreword to *Deadly Outbreaks*)

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way. Beyond the interesting science and methodology of epidemiology per se, the reader experiences vicariously the personal and professional mindsets of epidemiologists as they deal with substantial medical, bureaucratic, political and legal challenges, sometimes simultaneously, often while being well aware of the high stakes consequences of their findings. • (Don Hopkins, M.D., M.P.H., Vice President of Health Programs at The Carter Center) • This terrific book allows us to experience "shoe-leather" epidemiology at its very best. From the extraordinary detection of West Nile Virus in New York City to the control of drug-resistant malaria in the tropics, this endlessly fascinating book explores the world of epidemiologists at the front line in the global war against outbreaks, pandemics, and never before-seen deadly pathogens. A book for students, practitioners, and faculty alike, anyone who reads this will discover why epidemiology truly is the core science of public health. This is an extraordinary read! • (Matt Boulton, M.D., M.P.H., Professor of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, University of Michigan, School of Public Health, and Editor in Chief, American Journal of Preventive Medicine.) • Alexandra Levitt has produced a wonderfully crafted series of stories on how real-world epidemiologists practice the art and science of disease outbreak detection, investigation, and response. • All (chapters) offer fascinating insights into the thought process used by medical detectives and present the back stories that are found in all investigations but don't appear in journal publications. Dr. Levitt pays homage to the creativity, ingenuity, and dogged determination that are the hallmarks of all successful shoe-leather epidemiologists. It is written in the finest tradition of medical literature. Anyone with even a passing interest in disease investigation will find *Deadly Outbreaks* to be a great read. So too will all practitioners of public health, from students contemplating a career in epidemiology to the most seasoned veteran. • (Stephen Ostroff, M.D., Former Deputy Director, National Center for Infectious Diseases, CDC and Former Director, Bureau of Epidemiology, Pennsylvania Department of Health)

Great book for epidemic fans. Gives backstory of some well publicized epidemics and a few under the radar cases. Provides personnel involvement that describe various jobs available in the field if interested in a career in public health. I read it straight through and was pleased that I spent my time on the book. Learned a few things as well.

Fascinating book ... Medical detectives are awesome!!

Great book. Very well written.

While there have been notable books about public health for sometime (e.g. "The Hot Zone" and "The Coming Plague"), I've noticed an upsurge in interest lately. Quite a few of my friends have been reading books such as "The Ghost Map", about a famous cholera outbreak in London, and "The American Plague," about solving the mystery of yellow fever's transmission. Now, add to that "Deadly Outbreaks" by Dr. Levitt. If the above mentioned books can be compared to a novel, think about this book as a collection of short stories. As previous reviewers have mentioned, you will likely know the basics about a couple of the stories, while many of them will be new to you. The narrative ranges from a disease in New York putting multiple patients into the ICU to a deadly outbreak in the deserts of New Mexico. Though obviously a shorter story necessarily sacrifices some depth, the use of multiple stories allows for a layering effect that leads to a better appreciation of both the hard work and sheer luck involved in these investigations. There is the excitement of a good mystery, solved using the latest in scientific principles; but, there is also something deeper, namely an elucidation of the complex processes that go into the work of these disease detectives. While I've read previous books that make an attempt at this, "Deadly Outbreaks" is the first book that really makes me feel as though I understand the fundamental methods of a modern public health investigation (at a very basic level of course). At the same time, I never felt as though the narrative degenerated into a morass of medical jargon. You will learn some basic public health terminology, but more as a way of allowing you deeper into the narrative, rather than for show. I would recommend this to both those who are new to the subject, as well as those looking for a new perspective on public health investigations. Enjoy!

Lots of fascinating background on the detective work of modern scientists. I enjoyed the science and was impressed by the amount of sheer work invested in solving these mysterious diseases. The lucky moments, the ultimate success of persistence, the evolution of scientific tools — all these fascinated me. The degree to which pathogen experts see the world through a pathogen lens seemed telling. I was less interested in the background information on individual scientists. I suspect that's exactly the opposite reaction of many readers who will love the humanizing effect of knowing where a scientist went to college, and who they married and a bit about hobbies and children and careers. The narrative voice got stronger as the book progressed, so I encourage the casual reader to press onward if they start to feel overwhelmed early. The occasional use of less common vocabulary and numerous abbreviations may discourage some readers. Do you know what an abattoir is without looking it up? I didn't. For me, that's fun; a new word to learn. To some, it may not be fun and they'll wonder why the author didn't just say "slaughterhouse," which all her readers

would know. It doesn't happen often, and didn't really detract. I just noticed it. I absolutely recommend this book for anyone interested in science or disease. I'm sure that, just like me, you'll learn some interesting details about health scares you've heard about, and some you haven't. Kenn Amdahl, author of "Revenge of the Pond Scum: Searching for the causes of Alzheimer's Disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) and Parkinson's Disease"

This is a great book. In this cascade of fear over Ebola, it is reassuring to read of these cases of real people trying to figure out and overcome all sorts of real and potential medical horrors. It is an important example of a government agency actually cognizant of real problems and sending medical detectives on missions to determine solutions. Whoever this Patrick McConnon man is who is cited a number of times from the dedication to the hantavirus search, I'm glad he's on our side. This is a reassuring volume. Kit

If you are a person who wants to know what you should be worried about, you will want to read this book. I worked in health care economics most of my career and had many contacts with epidemiologists. They do extremely important work and this book is a fitting tribute to them. I skimmed the book because I am familiar with these kind of stories. I have tremendous respect for all of the people involved. They aren't perfect, they make mistakes but they are great people doing great work that most of us don't have the courage to do. Fine book, should have had an index and a bibliography. Midwest Independent Research, educational websites. Health care information, mwir-healthcareinformation.blogspot. There are book lists here, including one on infectious diseases.

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