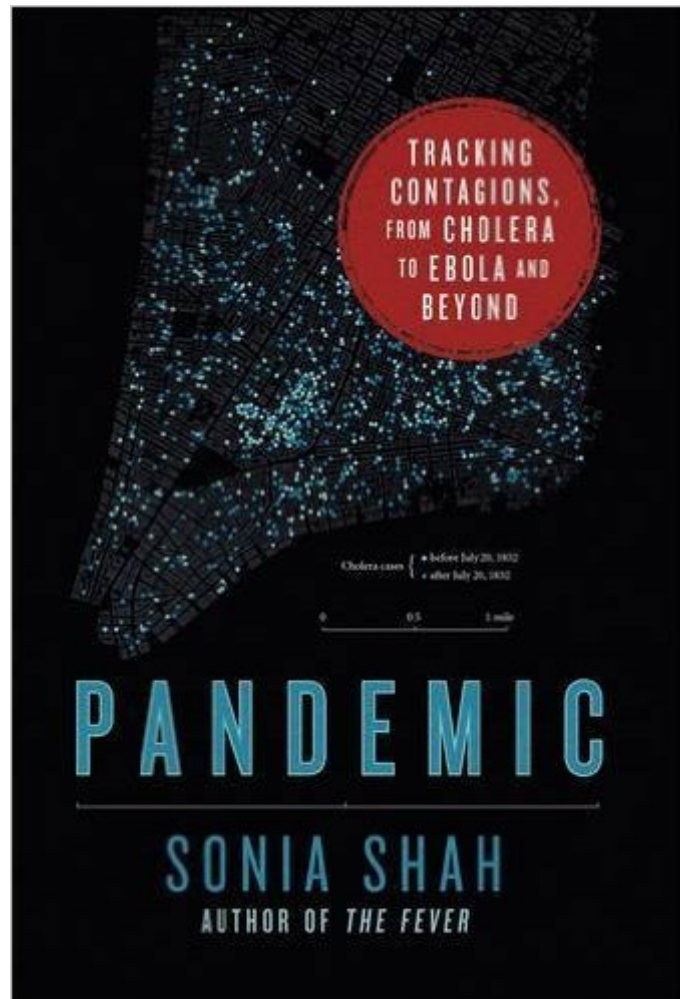


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# Pandemic: Tracking Contagions, From Cholera To Ebola And Beyond



## Synopsis

Scientists agree that a pathogen is likely to cause a global pandemic in the near future. But which one? And how? Over the past fifty years, more than three hundred infectious diseases have either newly emerged or reemerged, appearing in territories where they've never been seen before. Ninety percent of epidemiologists expect that one of them will cause a deadly pandemic sometime in the next two generations. It could be Ebola, avian flu, a drug-resistant superbug, or something completely new. While we can't know which pathogen will cause the next pandemic, by unraveling the story of how pathogens have caused pandemics in the past, we can make predictions about the future. In *Pandemic: Tracking Contagions, from Cholera to Ebola and Beyond*, the prizewinning journalist Sonia Shah—whose book on malaria, *The Fever*, was called a "tour-de-force history" (*The New York Times*) and "revealing" (*The New Republic*)—interweaves history, original reportage, and personal narrative to explore the origins of contagions, drawing parallels between cholera, one of history's most deadly and disruptive pandemic-causing pathogens, and the new diseases that stalk humankind today. To reveal how a new pandemic might develop, Sonia Shah tracks each stage of cholera's dramatic journey, from its emergence in the South Asian hinterlands as a harmless microbe to its rapid dispersal across the nineteenth-century world, all the way to its latest beachhead in Haiti. Along the way she reports on the pathogens now following in cholera's footsteps, from the MRSA bacterium that besieges her own family to the never-before-seen killers coming out of China's wet markets, the surgical wards of New Delhi, and the suburban backyards of the East Coast. By delving into the convoluted science, strange politics, and checkered history of one of the world's deadliest diseases, *Pandemic* reveals what the next global contagion might look like—and what we can do to prevent it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While a book of this nature is timely and would be welcome, it must be a book where scientific accuracy is above reproach. I found a number of errors that make me call into question the remainder of the information. It was researched heavily, but still misinformation made it into the book. A note here before I continue. I am in upper management of a mosquito control district, so I am quite informed about mosquito disease issues that are problematic here in the United States. With that said, some issues with her research include her information on West Nile virus and dengue in Florida. Her discussion of West Nile virus early in the book is a mixture of fact and conjecture. No one is really sure how West Nile first got started in this country (in Queens, New York), but most experts believe that the most likely scenario was either mosquitoes that hitch hiked aboard commercial airline flights, cargo flights or it was introduced through the illegal trade in rare and exotic birds. The author makes the claim that the disease had probably been introduced by way of migratory birds along the Atlantic flyway. The big problem is that, while these birds do get together during the summer in the Arctic, their migration routes take them over New York as the mosquitoes that can transmit West Nile (*Culex* spp.) are heading into winter hibernation. In addition, the birds most susceptible to West Nile are not birds found along this flyway. Birds that summer in the Arctic are geese, ducks, etc. and they are very resistant to this virus. It is pretty uncommon to find the virus in their blood, and if it is, it is at a very low threshold.

Any logical, clear-headed look at the world around us reveals that the true existential threats on the horizon include climate change, nuclear holocaust, pandemics, and, at a higher level of logical abstraction, rampant consumerism. However, the most immediate of these threats to our civilization appears to be contagious disease. In *Pandemic*, Sonia Shah's superb new survey of the past, present, and future of infectious disease. Just so it's clear: she's not writing about simple colds and mild flus, but about illnesses that might kill tens or hundreds of millions of people with little warning and with unpredictable consequences for the cohesion of society. The heart of the problem, as she explains, is that epidemics grow exponentially while our ability to respond proceeds linearly, at best. A balanced view of contagious disease Thanks to alarmist reporting, Americans

are terrified that hemorrhagic diseases such as Ebola will break out and kill us by the millions. Shah patiently explains that much more common diseases are far more likely to pose threats to us, influenza and cholera in particular. A series of unfortunate mutations in either one could fashion a disease that is not just virulent (contagious) but also highly lethal. Today, for example, influenza kills only a small proportion of its victims. We tend to regard it more as a nuisance for most of us, a threat only to those who are most vulnerable. However, the Spanish flu (the H1N1 virus) that broke out in the final days of World War I infected up to 500 million people (between a fifth and a third of the world's population) and killed between 50 and 100 million.

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