

1347 – 1353

Black Death Timeline

The Black Death was the deadliest pandemic in human history — a wave of bubonic plague that swept across Europe from 1347 to 1353, killing an estimated 30 to 60 percent of Europe's entire population and transforming medieval society.

1347

Plague Ships Arrive in Sicily

Ships from the Black Sea dock at Messina, Sicily, carrying dying sailors covered in black swellings — within days, townspeople fall sick and the plague begins spreading through Sicily.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Sicily landing was the entry point that set off the worst pandemic in European history — within a year, the plague had spread to nearly every corner of the continent via the same trade routes that had built medieval prosperity.*

1348

Spreads Through Italy and France

The plague races through the Italian city-states and into France via trade routes, reaching Paris and spreading rapidly among the dense urban populations that had no immunity and no effective treatment.

> **Why it mattered:** *The plague spread as fast as trade itself — following the roads and sea routes that connected medieval Europe's cities, striking densely populated areas hardest and collapsing the social fabric of entire communities.*

1348

Blame and Violence Against Jewish Communities

As the death toll mounts and people search for a cause, mobs across Europe attack Jewish communities, falsely accusing them of poisoning wells; Pope Clement VI issues a decree ordering the violence to stop, but it continues in many cities.

> **Why it mattered:** *The scapegoating of Jewish communities during the Black Death resulted in dozens of massacres across Europe, forcing Jewish populations to flee eastward — a pattern of persecution that would recur for centuries and whose consequences lasted into the modern era.*

Black Death Timeline *continued*

1348–49

Spreads to England and Northern Europe

The plague crosses the English Channel, reaches London in 1348, then spreads north and east across England, Scandinavia, and into the Holy Roman Empire, killing deeply in both cities and the countryside.

> **Why it mattered:** *No part of Europe was spared — the plague killed peasants and nobles, clergy and kings alike, destroying the social hierarchies that organized medieval life and leaving survivors to rebuild in a world with far fewer people.*

1349

Peak Death Toll

The plague reaches its deadliest peak across central and northern Europe; in some cities, half the population dies within months; graves fill faster than they can be dug, and mass burials become common.

> **Why it mattered:** *The sheer scale of death in 1349 — one in three or one in two people dying in a matter of months — was beyond anything European civilization had experienced, breaking down social structures and leaving communities too small to function as before.*

1349–51

Flagellant Movement

Groups of men called flagellants travel from town to town across Europe, publicly whipping themselves as penance, believing the plague is God's punishment for human sin.

> **Why it mattered:** *The flagellant movement showed how desperate people were for an explanation — and their mass marches through towns likely helped spread the plague further even as they sought to appease the divine wrath they believed had caused it.*

1353

First Wave Ends

The worst of the first wave of the Black Death recedes; it has killed an estimated 25–50 million people in Europe — roughly 30 to 60 percent of the continent's population; the plague returns in periodic outbreaks for the next three centuries.

> **Why it mattered:** *The demographic collapse transformed every aspect of medieval European society: labor was scarce, so surviving peasants could demand higher wages; the Church's authority weakened because it had failed to explain or halt the devastation; and a new awareness of death and its randomness permeated European culture and art.*