



Media only: Randall Kremer (202) 633-2950; kremerr@si.edu
Anna Torres (202) 633-2950; torresak@si.edu
Media website: <http://newsdesk.si.edu>
#Outbreak

Nov. 30, 2017

New Smithsonian Exhibition Explores Pandemics and Emerging Infectious Diseases

“Outbreak” Opens May 18, 2018

Next year, 2018, is the 100th anniversary of the Great Influenza, a pandemic that took the lives of 50–100 million people—between 3 and 5 percent of the world’s population at that time. The [Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History](#) will mark the anniversary with a new exhibition, “Outbreak: Epidemics in a Connected World,” which will open May 18 and remain on view for three years. This exhibition will examine the human ecology of epidemics. From the Nipah virus to SARS and HIV, it will show how viruses can spread from animals to people, why some outbreaks become epidemics and how people in different disciplines and countries are working together to stop them.

“More than ever before, our world is interconnected by global travel, trade, technology and even by our viruses,” said Kirk Johnson, the Sant Director of the National Museum of Natural History. “Exploring pandemic risks in this ecological context is part of our mission as a museum to understand the natural world and the place of humans within it.”

It is difficult to imagine the devastation of the 1918 influenza, but today, pandemic diseases remain one of the greatest threats to human health. More than 34 million people have died from HIV/AIDS since 1980, and 39 million are living with the disease today. In 2014, the Ebola epidemic in West Africa caused more deaths than all previous known outbreaks of the disease. More recently, other viral pathogens such as Zika and yellow fever have emerged and spread.

“‘Outbreak’ spotlights the human causes of infectious-disease epidemics, such as land-use change, urbanization and industrialized food production, as well as their consequences for communities, societies and the global population,” said Sabrina Sholts, lead curator of the exhibition and curator in the National Museum of Natural History’s [Department of Anthropology](#).

“Understanding how we can prevent zoonotic viruses like Ebola, Zika and influenza from emerging and quickly spreading around the world—recognizing that human, animal and environmental health are connected as ‘One Health’—is a critical science lesson for the 21st century.”

SI-669-2017

The exhibition will explore:

- **The origins of zoonotic diseases.** Since the rise of domestication, human interactions with other animals have increased and changed. Today, three-quarters of all new infectious diseases affecting humans originate in animals, and “Outbreak” will focus on how they spill over, spread and how they can be contained.
- **Humans’ role in spreading animal-borne viruses.** “Outbreak” will look at the effects of habitat fragmentation and diversity loss, urbanization and global travel on increasing the risks of zoonotic-disease emergence and highlight the role of scientific research and behavior change in lowering risks of disease transmission.
- **How outbreaks are handled.** Future outbreaks are certain to occur. The exhibition introduces people who play many different roles in the global fight against epidemics, from identifying their animal origins to developing vaccines and interventions to help prevent the next one.

Because outbreaks are a global health threat, the museum will offer a free “pop-up” version of the exhibition that communities worldwide can print and display. The pop-up includes guidelines and templates for translation and customization.

“We want people in all countries and settings to have effective communication tools about infectious diseases and One Health,” Sholts said. “We see this as an extraordinary opportunity to raise awareness about pandemic risks and keep everyone safer in our connected world.”

The National Museum of Natural History acknowledges the support of Rockefeller Foundation, Lyda Hill Foundation, Johnson & Johnson Innovation, Open Philanthropy, Skoll Global Threats Fund, Page Family Foundation Donor Advised Fund, Seqirus, Anders Foundation, National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Infectious Diseases Society of America and RTI International.

The following organizations also contributed in the creation of this exhibition: EcoHealth Alliance, National Institutes of Health’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, ProMED/International Society for Infectious Diseases, the USAID Emerging Pandemic Threats Division and the American Society for Microbiology.

The National Museum of Natural History is one of the most-visited natural history museums in the world. Opened in 1910, the museum is dedicated to maintaining and preserving the world’s most extensive collection of natural history specimens and human artifacts. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Admission is free. For more information, visit the museum on its [website](#) and on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

###