

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

NPHS World History

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 14<sup>th</sup> Century Advice on How to Avoid the Plague

Background: Despite being helpless in the face of disease, medieval populations tried many methods of preventing and controlling the spread of plague. Doctors wrote extensively about the plague. There was no real way to treat the plague other than to relieve the symptoms; the first real measure to cure the plague didn't come until 1897 when a vaccine was developed. Below is a list of the most common recommendations for avoiding or coping with plague.

### HOW TO AVOID BECOMING ILL WITH PLAGUE, OR CURE THOSE WITH DISEASE

1. Repent, pray, do penance for your sins.
2. Punish yourself by whipping; your pain may pay for sin.
3. Flee, preferably to mountains, clean air, and isolated places.
4. Confine the sick to their own homes.
5. Limit the number of people who can attend a funeral or meet together in public places.
6. Burn the clothes, bedding, and possessions of the diseased.
7. Bury bodies at least 6 feet deep, and cover with lime before replacing earth.
8. Avoid congested areas.
9. Do not buy cloth made in regions or from persons known to be infected.
10. Maintain morale by reading entertaining love-stories or humorous tales.
11. Avoid fear, worry, sadness, anger.
12. Break up the air inside your home by ringing bells and releasing birds, then chasing them so they fly around the room.
13. Do not bathe, for this opens the pores to the air.
14. Burn aromatic woods in your home. Periodically, throw a powdered mixture of sulphur and arsenic on your fire.
15. Fill your house with pleasant-smelling flowers, sprinkled with vinegar and rose-water.
16. Inhale mixtures of black pepper, roses, amber, camphor, myrrh, and sweet basil bound together.
17. Breathe in the smell of sewage.
18. Spend time in smoky and stinking places.
19. Regulate butchers and meat-sellers, to ensure that what is sold is fresh. Butcher large animals outside city limits.
20. Avoid both fasting and eating to excess.
21. Purge the body with laxatives.
22. Draw off impure or excessive blood by bleeding.
23. Eat a pickled onion every day before breakfast.
24. Force anyone entering the city who carries any powders or ointments to swallow them.
25. Kill Jews, foreigners, gypsies, beggars, and lepers.
26. Put a flattened old rooster on the buboes (swellings).
27. Cover buboes with clay, sear buboes with red-hot iron, cut open and drain buboes.
28. Write God's name on the inside of a cup, pour in water. When ink has dissolved, have sick person drink it.
29. Draw off impure or excessive blood by bleeding.

Source: Adapted from Marjorie Rowling, *Everyday Life in Medieval Times* (New York: Dorset Press, 1968), 187

Questions:

1. Choose **three** of the above that you think are GOOD ideas to help patients suffering from plague. **Why** are these good ideas?

2. Choose **three** of the above that you think are BAD ideas for dealing with plague. **Why** are these bad ideas?