



For Immediate Release

Germ City: Microbes and the Metropolis
On View at the Museum of the City of New York
Beginning September 14



A Fascinating Look at New York City's Battle Against Infectious Disease

(New York, NY, September 13, 2018) Humans and microbes have always co-habited and their relationship has had a profound influence on history, especially in cities, the crossroads of the movements of people, goods, and germs. [***Germ City: Microbes and the Metropolis***](#), on view at the Museum of the City of New York from September 14, 2018, through April 28, 2019, will explore the complex and fascinating history of infectious disease and epidemic outbreaks in New York City. It is a history involving government officials, urban planners, medical professionals, businesses, activists, and ordinary people. The exhibition will focus on the personal, cultural, and political, as well as the medical dimensions of contagion. It will interweave historical and contemporary perspectives, blending art, history, and science to explore the meaning of disease in the urban context.

Germ City is organized by the Museum of the City of New York in collaboration with The New York Academy of Medicine and Wellcome Trust, a global charitable foundation which aims to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive. **Germ City** the inaugural exhibition of [Contagious Cities](#), a major international project led by Wellcome which explores the interplay of people and pathogens in urban contexts. Combining different perspectives and expertise, partners in the project co-produce exhibitions, interactive experiences, artist residencies, events, broadcasts and more. *Contagious Cities* is being staged in New York, Geneva, and Hong Kong.

“We are honored to be the New York anchor of this three-city global initiative and to work with a foundation like Wellcome,” said Whitney W. Donhauser, the President and Ronay Menschel Director of the Museum of the City of New York. “As a historic port city, New York is a compelling location to study the complex relationship between microbes, migration, and the metropolis.”

“The Academy is pleased to partner with our neighbor The Museum of the City of New York and with the Wellcome Trust on this important exhibition and program series,” said Judith A. Salerno, MD, MS, President of The New York Academy of Medicine. “This effort brings together our collective expertise on the history of health in New York and the impact that outbreaks of disease over time have had on New York City’s residents, infrastructure, and its many interlocking systems including housing, urban planning, water systems, migration, and public health policies.”

Germs are a part of life. They are the reason we wash our hands, cover our mouths when we sneeze, and take care when we get close to others. But the bacteria and viruses that inhabit and sometimes infect our bodies are also a major, if microscopic, feature of our urban environment. Indeed, the history of New York has been plagued, quite literally, by a variety of contagious diseases. Among them was the 1918 flu pandemic that killed tens of millions worldwide a century ago this year.

When tiny germs interact with a massive metropolis like New York City, no aspect of life goes untouched. Divided into five sections—“Microbes and the Metropolis,” “Containment,” “Investigation,” “Care,” and “Urban Environment”—**Germ City** will tell stories about health and illness, immune systems and antibiotics, breakthroughs in treatments and vaccinations, and the lives and struggles of ordinary New Yorkers. But it is equally about the structure of urban life: housing, water systems, sanitation, individual and collective rights, and public policy at every level. And, because responses to disease so closely reflect the dynamic of their times, the history of contagion inevitably shines a light on social injustices and conflicts as they have played out over the generations.

“On the centenary of the 1918 flu pandemic, it feels more important than ever to explore the surprising connections between people and pathogens,” said Ken Arnold, Creative Director of Wellcome. “Inspired by Wellcome’s strategic concern with the prevention of and preparation for future epidemics, we are thrilled to have this collaboration as part of *Contagious Cities*, showing how urban environments can nurture ideas and, like any other contagion, help spread them far and wide.”

The exhibition will have a hybrid gallery and library where visitors can view historical artifacts alongside contemporary artworks created for the exhibition, delve into the exhibition’s themes with a curated selection of books, and access a wide range of perspectives through digital interactives.

The exhibition will also feature the work of Blast Theory, a pioneering artist group based in Brighton, England, who create interactive art to explore social and political questions; multimedia artist and

filmmaker Mariam Ghani; artist and designer Ekene Ijeoma; and artist Jordan Eagles, whose “Blood Mirror,” a sculpture created with 59 blood donations from gay, bisexual, transgender men, will be on view. Other featured artists include Christopher Payne, Gran Fury, Glenn Ligon for Visual AIDS, and Louisa Bertman and Bob Civil for the LGBT Community Center.

Supported by Wellcome as part of *Contagious Cities*, an international collaborative project, developed by Wellcome taking place throughout 2018 and early 2019. It is initiated by Wellcome’s Creative Director, Ken Arnold, and delivered by Cultural Projects Manager Danielle Olsen working with partners across New York, London, Hong Kong, and Geneva. www.wellcome.ac.uk/contagiouscities

Germ City: Microbes and the Metropolis is made possible with lead support from Wellcome as part of Contagious Cities; and Valerie and John W. Rowe; with additional support from Johnson & Johnson; the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation; and the Honorable Keith Powers, New York City Council, District 4.

The exhibition was curated by Sarah M. Henry, PhD, Deputy Director and Chief Curator at the Museum of the City of New York, Rebecca Hayes Jacobs, PhD, Andrew W. Mellon Post-Doctoral Curatorial Fellow at the Museum of the City of New York, and Anne Garner, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts in the Library at The New York Academy of Medicine.

The Museum gratefully acknowledges The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s support for exhibition curator Dr. Rebecca Jacobs’s postdoctoral fellowship.

The Museum gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Illumina for its support of swabbing samples by Weill Cornell Medicine at ***Germ City*** educational events.

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Audio Guide

Germ City will mark the launch of a new, interactive feature courtesy of Urban Archive from AudioX beta providing a more immersive experience at the Museum of the City of New York. Using the Urban Archive app as the platform, as visitors navigate through the 5 sections of ***Germ City***, additional audio commentary and close up views of artifacts on display will be pushed to their devices.

The New York Academy of Medicine and The Museum of the City of New York are offering an array of public and education programs while ***Germ City*** is on view:

[*The World's Deadliest Pandemic: A Century Later*](#)

Date: Thursday, September 27, 2018

Location: Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street

One hundred years after the global influenza pandemic of 1918, one of the deadliest disease outbreaks in human history, experts look back at the crisis and consider our present-day pandemic readiness.

Educator Workshop—Germ City: Science + History

Date: Wednesday, October 3, 2018

Location: Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street

This program includes a curator-led exhibition tour, followed by an optional workshop for high school educators using the National History Day model and primary sources to learn how to bring project-based learning into your classroom. Participation in the tour provides one hour of CTLE credit. Participation in the tour and workshop for educators provides two hours of CTLE credit.

Chancellor's Day: Microbes and the Metropolis

Date: Tuesday, November 6, 2018

Location: Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street

Discover the science, history, and art of germs, as you explore New York's long battle against infectious disease in this interactive day filled with tours, workshops, and an introduction to NYC History Day. Participation in this program provides five hours of CTLE credit.

Community Care Fair

Date: Sunday, November 18, 2018

Location: Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Avenue at 103rd Street

What does care mean to you? Join us for a family day to explore objects, traditions, and stories of people caring for one another.

Disease and Disparity: The Realities of the Uneven Playing Field of Health

Date: Wednesday, November 28, 2018

Location: New York Academy of Medicine, 1216 Fifth Avenue at 103rd St

Illness isn't a result of biology alone. Economic status, race, ethnicity, immigration status, housing, and other factors play a key role in a person's and a population's health outcomes. Leading scholars consider the attitudes, stigmatization, and even violence surrounding disease and treatment past and present.

Remembering the Dead

Date: Wednesday, February 6, 2019

Location: New York Academy of Medicine, 1216 Fifth Avenue at 103rd St

Over 20,600 New Yorkers died in just two months in the fall of 1918 from influenza. Today, memorials to those who died from infectious disease or artworks commemorating those living with disease are rare. Join us for a conversation about the experiences of those affected by infectious disease, the role of stigma in social and institutional responses to illness, and who is remembered, forgotten, and commemorated.

The Hospital Zone at Ellis Island: A Walking Tour

Date: Saturday, March 23, 2019

Location: Meet at Castle Clinton at Battery Park in Lower Manhattan

Join us for a private hard hat tour of the hospital zone at Ellis Island, one of the most important public health locations in New York City. The hospital complex at Ellis Island was once the gold standard of medical care in the United States. As the country's first public health hospital, it served the millions of immigrants who passed through its doors open entering the country.

Additional programming and events will be held at partner institutions such as [The Tenement Museum](#), [New York Public Library](#), [Brooklyn Historical Society](#), and [Graduate Center of the City of New York](#).

About the Museum of the City of New York

The Museum of the City of New York fosters understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in the world's most influential metropolis. It engages visitors by celebrating, documenting, and interpreting the city's past, present, and future. To connect with the Museum on social media, follow us on Instagram and Twitter at @MuseumofCityNY and visit our Facebook page at [Facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY](https://www.facebook.com/MuseumofCityNY). For more information please visit www.mcny.org.

About The New York Academy of Medicine

Established in 1847, The New York Academy of Medicine is dedicated to ensuring everyone has the opportunity to live a healthy life. Through our original research, policy and program initiatives we provide the evidence base to address the structural and cultural barriers to good health and drive progress toward health equity. This work and our one-of-a-kind public programming are supported by our world class historical medical library and our Fellows program, a unique network of more than 2,000 experts elected by their peers from across the professions affecting health. For more information visit www.nyam.org.

About Wellcome

Wellcome exists to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive. We're a global charitable foundation, both politically and financially independent. We support scientists and researchers, take on big problems, fuel imaginations and spark debate. www.wellcome.ac.uk

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Photo credit:

"Typist wearing mask," New York City, October 16, 1918, Courtesy of The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.