



## Understanding Epidemics Section 1: The basics

### PART D: Impacts

---

#### Contents:

- [Short-term impacts](#)
  - [Long-term impacts](#)
- 

#### Short-term impacts

Our small South Seas island would have been devastated by the deaths of more than a third of its inhabitants in about a month.

But the length of time to demographic recovery would depend on which sections of the population were most affected by the disease and whether there was a repeat epidemic within a few years.

If most of those who died were infants, young children and the old then it would be possible for a population of 257 to increase its fertility so replacing the young people who had died.

However, if in other circumstances the disease responsible for the epidemic had been AIDS or tuberculosis, then many of the victims would come from the most reproductive and economically active age groups.

Many households would be broken, children orphaned and partners left to fend for themselves. In these situations the recovery time would be much longer and life chances would be much reduced for perhaps several decades.

---

#### Long-term impacts

Although the demographic impact of epidemics is still important and damaging, at least in the short-term, it is also possible for the short, sharp shocks that such crises administer to have longer-term beneficial effects.

For example, it is clear that the various epidemics of Asiatic cholera that struck Europe and America in the nineteenth century provoked governments to intervene and to attempt some improvements in public health measures especially in terms of water supply, sanitation and sewerage.

The urban sanitary revolution of the Victorian age has had a lasting impact on improvements in life expectancy in the twentieth century.