The Black Death returns: Bubonic plague outbreak in Madagascar leaves 32 dead and 100 quarantined in prison

The disease wiped out a third of Europe in the 14th Century and has returned to parts of Africa and Asia in recent years.

PA

Bubonic plague, which 700 years ago wiped out a third of Europe, has broken out on Madagascar.

At least 32 people on the East African island have died from the ‘Black Death’ with another 100 suspected cases. Surviving victims are being held in a prison.

The disease is spread by fleas carried by rats. If left untreated, it is fatal within 24 hours.

In the 14th Century, 25 million people in Europe fell victim but modern antibiotics can stop the disease in it’s tracks.

Many of the victims on the poverty stricken island were being held in a rat-infested prison.

Experts say that Africa - especially Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo - accounts for more than 90% of cases worldwide.

The Pasteur Institute of health experts believe they can contain the outbreak but spokesman Evaristo Oliviera said: “If the plague gets into prisons, there could be a sort of atomic explosion of plague within the town.

"The prison walls will never prevent the plague from getting out and invading the rest of the town.”

During the last 20 years, three countries experienced outbreaks of human plague after dormant periods of up to 50 years.

The areas were India in 1994 and 2002, Indonesia in 1997 and Algeria in 2003.