

Seattle Is Dying: HIV Outbreak Hits Homeless



By Alex Berezow, PhD — April 19, 2019



Seattle

Last month, we reported on an earth-shattering documentary not-so-subtly titled [Seattle Is Dying](#) ^[1]. It reported on the unforgivably pathetic state of affairs facing the city -- homeless people literally dying on the streets from drug overdoses, exposure, and untreated health problems while public health officials do absolutely nothing.

The blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of the Mayor, City Council, and City Attorney, whose collective refusal to enforce basic laws -- such as camping, injecting drugs, and defecating in public spaces -- has resulted in a predictable consequence: An uncompassionate, feckless public health policy that has cost the lives of hundreds of suffering homeless people.

"Medieval" isn't too harsh a word to describe what it's like to live in one's own filth in the street. Ancient diseases that are preventable with vaccination and basic hygiene [have come roaring back](#) ^[2]. Outbreaks of *Shigella*, which causes bloody diarrhea, and trench fever, which is associated with soldiers fighting in the trenches of World War I, have occurred in Seattle. There is a [typhus outbreak](#) ^[3] in Los Angeles. And an outbreak of hepatitis A among homeless people in San Diego sickened 600 and killed 20.

HIV Outbreak Infects 14 Homeless People in Seattle

Things continue to deteriorate. The CDC just reported that, in 2018, an HIV outbreak in the Seattle area infected 27 heterosexual drug users, nearly quadruple the number in 2017. Of these 27 individuals, 14 (eleven women and three men) were homeless; of this latter group, most were intravenous drug users and/or moonlighted as sex workers.

The tragic irony is that Seattle, and the nation as a whole, has gotten the HIV epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s completely under control. Even among intravenous drug users, the number of

new HIV cases continues to decline, thanks in part to programs that provide users with clean syringes. But people who, for whatever reason, choose not to take advantage of such programs run a real risk of getting infected, not just with HIV but a whole host of other pathogens.

Homeless camps are [ticking time bombs of infectious disease](#) [4]. If people dropping dead on city sidewalks doesn't prompt Seattle into action, what will?

Source [5]: Golden MR, Lechtenberg R, Glick SN, et al. "Outbreak of Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection Among Heterosexual Persons Who Are Living Homeless and Inject Drugs — Seattle, Washington, 2018." *MMWR* 68 (15):344-349. Published: 19-April-2019. DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm6815a2

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Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/04/19/seattle-dying-hiv-outbreak-hits-homeless-13969>

Links

[1] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2019/03/19/seattle-dying-hundreds-homeless-dead-due-failed-public-health-policy-13896>

[2] <https://www.bizjournals.com/seattle/news/2018/06/29/opinion-seattles-homelessness-crisis-is-about-to.html>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/10/06/homeless-update-typhus-outbreak-los-angeles-13483>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/09/13/homeless-camps-are-infectious-disease-time-bombs-11820>

[5] <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6815a2.htm>