
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Will Covid-19 change cities?

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Neil

From the bubonic plague to cholera and tuberculosis, disease and pandemics have changed the way cities have been built. For example, buildings in 19th century Paris were designed with large, high-up windows to allow plenty of sunlight. They were supposed to stop the spread of tuberculosis.

Rob

Coronavirus has been no different. In lockdown, cities from Rio to Barcelona were transformed as wildlife and birdsong replaced the noise of taxi horns and traffic. And with no car pollution you could even see the stars at night!

Neil

In this programme we'll be asking if cities after lockdown will ever be the same again – and if we want them to be.

Rob

We'll be hearing some ideas from different cities around the world.

Neil

And of course we'll be learning some new vocabulary along the way. One of the cities most affected by Covid-19 was Mumbai in India – but approximately how many people were affected? What's the estimated population of Mumbai? That's my quiz question for you today Rob. Is it:

- a) 15 million people?
- b) 20 million people? or,
- c) 25 million people?

Rob

I know Mumbai is an international mega-city so I'll say b) 20 million people.

Neil

OK, Rob, we'll find out later if that's right. Now, Beatriz Colomina is a professor of architecture at Princeton University in the United States. She's spent years researching the relationship between cities and disease. Here she is talking with Kavita Puri, presenter of BBC World Service programme, *The Inquiry*:

Kavita Puri

Take tuberculosis. Unlike cholera, which was eliminated in London by re-designing the sewage system in the 1850s, TB was **airborne**.

Professor Colomina

It became a real problem with the rise of the industrial cities, the **metropolis**, before an **antibiotic** was effective.

Kavita Puri

One in seven people on the planet had TB, but in dense cities like Paris, it was one in three. Closely packed tenements meant the disease **spread like wildfire** and architects and planning experts responded.

Rob

Some diseases, like cholera, could be prevented by redesigning cities to improve hygiene, like the waste water sewers in 19th century London. But the problem with tuberculosis, or TB for short, was that the disease is **airborne** – carried and spread in the air.

Neil

Adding to the problem was the fact that **antibiotics** – medicines like penicillin that can destroy harmful bacteria or stop their growth – was not discovered until 1928 – too late to save the thousands of people who died in Mumbai, New York, Paris and other cities during the 1800s.

Rob

Diseases like TB killed more and more people as cities industrialised and grew bigger and bigger, leading to the creation of the **metropolis** – the largest, busiest and most important city in a country or region.

Neil

Many people crowded together in large **metropolises** meaning that disease could **spread like wildfire** – an idiom meaning spread quickly around many people.

Rob

Even today disease is shaping our cities. In post-Covid Paris, new ideas for a '15 minute city' aim to make all public services available within a fifteen minute walk to help people working from home.

Neil

Other countries want to build better, more affordable housing outside the city centre.

Rob

But according to Mumbai resident Dr Vaidehi Tandel this won't work – even if the housing on offer is better. But why? The reason is work.

Dr Vaidehi Tandel

When you shift them out, you're moving them away from their **livelihoods** and they're not going to be able to sustain themselves there so they will be coming back because their jobs are in the city and they cannot afford the **commute** from further off places.

Rob

Dr Vaidehi Tandel there, talking on the BBC World Service programme The Inquiry. Trying to make cities less crowded is one way to minimise the risks from disease. But moving people away from the city centre means moving them away from their **livelihood** – their job or other way of earning money to pay for food, housing and clothing.

Neil

Many people still want to live near their workplace in the city centre because they can't afford to pay for the **commute** – the journey between their home and their place of work.

Rob

Which is real problem when you live in a city of... how many people did you say live in Mumbai, Neil?

Neil

Ah yes, in our quiz question I asked you what the estimated population of Mumbai is.

Rob

I said b) 20 million.

Neil

And you were absolutely right! Around 20 million people live in the Mumbai **metropolis**, making it very difficult to socially distance.

Rob

In this programme we've been discussing the relationship between cities and disease. In the 1800s, tuberculosis, or TB, killed thousands because it was an **airborne** disease – spread in the air, and hard to prevent.

Neil

Antibiotics – medicinal chemicals like penicillin which can destroy harmful germs, couldn't help because they weren't discovered until decades later.

Rob

So in **metropolises** – the largest and most important cities, where people live crowded close together, diseases **spread like wildfire** – an idiom meaning spread widely and quickly.

Neil

In Mumbai and other places, the problem remains that many people need the city for their **livelihood** – job or other way of earning money.

Rob

So they prefer to live in the city centre instead of paying for the daily **commute** – a journey, often by train, bus or car, from your home to your workplace.

Neil

That's all we have time for in this programme, but remember you can find more useful vocabulary, trending topics and help with your language learning here at BBC Learning English. Bye for now!

Rob

Bye!

VOCABULARY

airborne

carried and spread in the air

metropolis

largest, busiest and most important city in a country or region.

antibiotics

chemical or medicine, like penicillin, that can destroy harmful bacteria or stop their growth

spread like wildfire

(idiom) spread quickly around many people

commute

distance you travel on your journey between your home and your place of work

livelihood

job or other way of earning money to pay for what you need to live