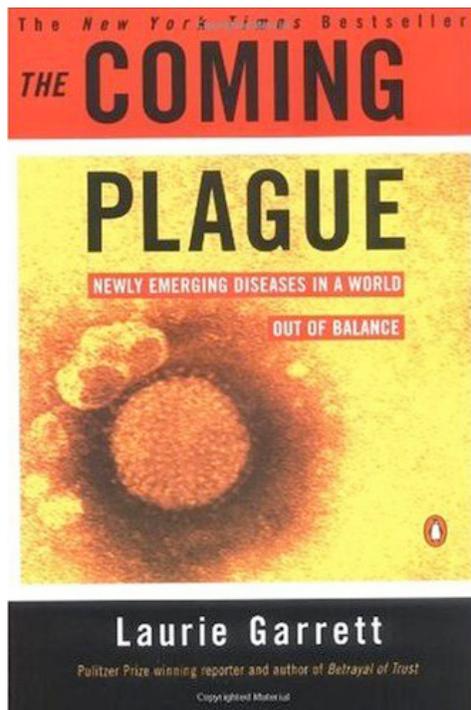


Let's Talk About Pandemics...

8:32 PM PDT, May 20, 2009

When the H1N1 Flu (Swine Flu) Virus surfaced last month, I learned that the outbreaks can become epidemics when they are widespread and then become known as pandemics when they affect entire continents or the world as with the Black Death in Europe and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. At that point, it becomes a much bigger deal than an annual flu shot.

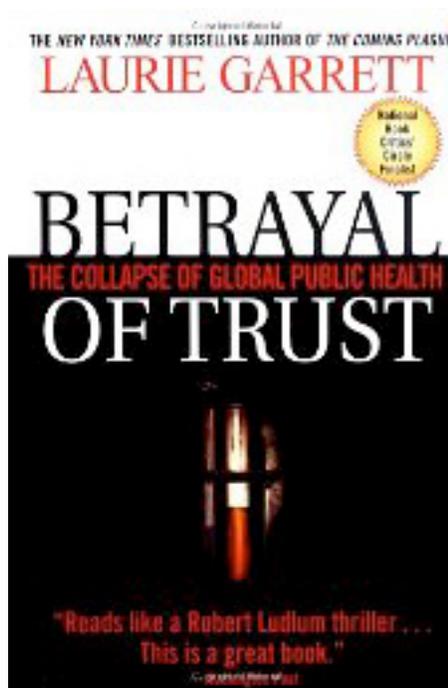
[In a recent NPR interview](#), Laurie Garrett attempted to put our current flu problems into perspective with the estimated 100 million people that had succumbed to a similar virus during the 1918 pandemic, when a third of the world was infected. [Then USA Today reported yesterday](#) that the World Health Organization was holding off raising its pandemic alert to the highest level to avoid panic and confusion since it appeared to be mild in most cases. Personally that only whets my interest in the numbers.



[The CDC was now listing more than 5000 cases](#) in the 48 states with a death rate described as slightly lower than that seen with regular seasonal influenza. Now I wanted to know more about this science writer who was talking about immune systems and Swine Flu with the greatest of ease and authority. As it turns out, [Laurie Garrett is a Senior Fellow for Global Health](#) at the Council on Foreign Relations and an extremely gifted writer, having been awarded the three big P's: The Peabody, The Polk and The Pulitzer awards for journalism.

For some frightening insight into what's at risk globally, [watch and listen to her assessment of the pandemic threat in 2007](#) in the context of the H5N1 (Bird Flu) in Asia and [then read TED's recent follow-up with her](#) three weeks ago concerning this most recent of wake up calls. I find it very comforting just knowing that she is involved. For additional information, Garrett is the author of two best sellers, [The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance](#), chronicling the spread of infectious diseases over the last 50 years and reminds us that, in addition to extremists, we are also at war with an enormous number of really small things as well, whose survival instincts are much better than ours.

Her second book, [Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health](#), which is an exploration of the decline of public



health around the world, should not only be taken seriously by leaders and policymakers but it should also be read by medical professionals and the general public to galvanize a change in thinking and in priorities.

These are large healthcare issues also that are destined to affect everyone. You won't be disappointed in the amount of information that is offered here as a result of Dr. Garrett's work and what you will learn from her.