

Nottingham Mail

Keeping you informed

Exclusive! New rat plague threatens Region

By Vari Sella, prize-winning Investigative Reporter

A pensioner and the lead singer of local band *H is for Hot*, Carrie Oakey (27) were today at the centre of a major disease outbreak – conflicting reports suggest it might be Weil’s disease, a new disease called ‘Hanta’ or even bubonic plague. The outbreak’s source may be mutant rats and could already be in a drain near you.



(Left to right) Ginger Rayle back on his allotment; Carrie (left) in happier times; the bug that causes plague and local rats.

Ginger, who would not reveal his real name, said, ‘it was dreadful – I thought I was going to die. There are always loads of rats down on the allotment – they come up from the canal. Some of them are the size of cats or even dogs. Somebody should do something about it.’ He went on to say that ‘some government group’ is investigating the outbreak but complained that nobody would tell him exactly what was going on. Carrie, who had a hit in the late noughties with ‘Fat Caterwaul’, and then split from her band over ‘artistic differences’ before spending five years in therapy after a ‘nasty reaction to prescription medication’, now lives out of the limelight, but is believed to be planning a comeback after rave reviews for her 2015 appearance on *Never Mind the Buzzcocks*. Her agent, Hugh Jass, said, ‘Carrie is getting much better and wishes to thank the legions of fans who have sent her get-well messages.’

Initial reports suggested that the disease was Weil’s Disease, named after the German composer of hit musicals, and a growing problem, especially in the third world. It got in the headlines in the UK a few years ago when an Olympic rower

died of the disease after training in British lakes. Caused by bacteria called 'leptospire', according to the Health and Safety Executive, 'anyone who is exposed to rats, rat or cattle urine or to fetal fluids from cattle is at risk. Workers in contact with canal and river water are also at risk.'

However, a mysterious government group, working out of the notorious animal research centre at Sutton Bonington, are known to want to question both Carrie and Ginger. Reporters from your *Notts Mail* managed to contact the group with some questions. An anonymous spokesperson said that the cause was actually 'hantaviruses' and warned that the virus was found in rat droppings and urine. This secretive government group, which doesn't appear on any government web site, is believed to work closely with Porton Down. Plague wiped out most of Europe's population in the Middle Ages, and was being developed as a biological weapon by many countries including the UK.

Further investigation of the University of Nottingham's web sites showed several groups working on plague. There is, of course, no suggestion that this could be an accidental escape from the laboratory, as happened a few years ago with Foot and Mouth disease from the government's Pirbright laboratories. However, Nottingham hospital labs were recently at the centre of a storm about lab accidents with dangerous bugs.

The disease outbreak in Nottingham comes on top of worries about a plague of "genetically-mutated" brown rats that are resistant to normal poisons. The recent flooding across many parts of the UK has forced the 'super rats' out of the sewers.

Terry Bull, from Notts Best Pest Control Ltd, said: "It's becoming more of an issue now simply because of the number of rats that are being seen. They've also mutated genetically and are immune to standard poisons. We have to start using different methods such as trapping and gassing, which are less effective and cost a lot more."

Although Ginger and Carrie have now been released from hospital, and appear completely recovered, working out just what disease is spreading through our waterways must be a government priority.

When we contacted QMC, another anonymous spokesperson agreed communication could sometimes be a problem with what she referred to as 'sister' organisations. Health bodies, she went on, 'have generally learnt from bitter experience that openness is nearly always the right policy.' Dr Albert Camus, an expert on the politics of disease outbreaks in the developing world, noted that organisations such as the mysterious Sutton Bonington group will often have 'no conscience. Sometimes it has a policy, but nothing more.'