

## **The World Health Organization answers the question: What is Disease X?**

### **Health/Science**

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**In China, the deadly pathogen has killed 623 of the 1,625 people who have been infected so far, according to The Sun. That equates to a mortality rate of 38%. However, the virus cannot yet be transmitted between humans.**

From The Week, June 20, 2018 The World Health Organization has included "Disease X" in its latest blueprint for accelerating research and development during health emergencies such as Ebola or Sars epidemics. This year's [global strategy plan](#) is the first to feature an as-yet unknown pathogen, Disease X, which may not come from an identified source. So should we be worried? **What is Disease X?** The WHO plan lists eight "priority diseases" that require immediate attention based on epidemic potential or lack of sufficient countermeasures or vaccines. The list includes [Ebola](#) and [Zika](#), as well as Disease X. According to the specialised UN agency's definition, Disease X does not exist, but instead "represents the knowledge that a serious international epidemic could be caused by a pathogen currently unknown to cause human disease, and so the R&D [research and development] Blueprint explicitly seeks to enable cross-cutting R&D preparedness that is also relevant for an unknown Disease X as far as possible". Experts say Disease X could be a mutation of an already known disease, such as influenza, which means its composition and effectiveness are near impossible to predict, the [Daily Express](#) reports. Disease X "could also be deliberately developed and spread by humans", the newspaper says, adding that "it is understood 16 countries including the United States, have had or are suspected of having biological weapons programmes". Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said: "As experience has taught us, more often than not the thing that is going to hit us is something that we did not anticipate. Just the way we didn't anticipate Zika, we didn't think there would be an Ebola that would hit cities." As such, "X" stands for unexpected, he explained. [...]  
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