AI SAFETY SANDBOX · BIOSECURITY

Biosecurity before the year 1000: a history mini-essay

Starter · A weekend · Free · Step-by-step guide

Online version: https://ai-safety-sandbox.vercel.app/projects/ancient-quarantine-history/

Summary

How did ancient and medieval societies protect themselves from plague? Research one historical practice (quarantine, isolation, trade rules) and draw a lesson for today.

Why it matters

History shows which measures worked, which backfired, and why people trusted or resisted them. It is an ideal entry point for historians and humanities students.

What you will have at the end

A 1,500-word essay with sources.

Steps (tick each box as you go)

- [ ] **1. Pick one practice and place (1 hr)**
  Choose a specific example of disease control before the year 1000 (or later, if you prefer). Narrow is better than broad.
- [ ] **2. Find good sources (2–3 hr)**
  Use your library's history databases. Prefer historians' work over popular summaries, and note where sources disagree.
- [ ] **3. Describe what happened (2 hr)**
  Who decided, who complied, what it cost, and whether it seemed to work.
- [ ] **4. Draw a careful lesson (1 hr)**
  What carries over to modern pandemics, and what is different? Avoid over-claiming.
- [ ] **5. Edit and share (1 hr)**
  Cut it to the strongest version and share it with your group or on a blog.

What you need

- Library access
- A weekend

What you will learn

- The long history of pandemic response

- Using historical evidence carefully
- Why trust shapes public-health measures

Source and links

Hatta & Bazarragchaa — A hundred project ideas in biosecurity (2025)
https://casualphysicsenjoyer.com/Essays+in+progress/Biosecurity/A+hundred+project+ideas+in+Biosecurity

When you have finished

Write a few paragraphs on what you did, what you found and what you would try next, and share it with a friend, your society or online.

Try next: History of biosecurity project ideas
https://ai-safety-sandbox.vercel.app/projects/history-of-biosecurity-ideas/

Courses, mentors, small grants and communities:
https://ai-safety-sandbox.vercel.app/next-steps/

Questions? Ask in AI Safety Cardiff University (AISCU): https://aiscu.org/

Notes