
The newcomer to the study of infectious diseases is often daunted by the breadth and depth of the material that needs to be covered. Whether in epidemiology, tropical medicine, or travel medicine, it is necessary to know broad swaths of microbiology, entomology (and other zoology), botany, hydrology, geography, and even climatology to fully understand the mechanisms of disease occurrence and successful treatment. It is very useful, therefore, to have a framework that organizes the disparate facts about infectious pathogens in a way that makes their transmission, control, and prevention easier to understand.

Communicable Disease Epidemiology and Control: A Global Perspective is a compact volume that does just that. Taking its perspective as that of the global public health prac-
tioner, it focuses on the special objectives of disease control. The book first offers necessary background on communicable diseases in general, providing chapters on the discipline’s definitions and on common epidemiologic measures of disease burden. These are followed by a chapter on communicable disease theory, which dwells on the essentials of transmission dynamics and on ways these can be experimentally modeled. Control principles and strategies are then reviewed, including examples based on practical “real world” experience, stressing the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to communicable disease control. A separate chapter concisely reviews the implementation of outbreak investigation and control measures, and the necessary machinery for providing surveillance and control of infection.

The main body of the book provides an organized listing of pathogens, including brief descriptions of their clinical features and transmission factors, their means of diagnosis, incubation period, duration of communicability, typical occurrence, and distribution, treatment, and appropriate methods for surveillance. What is particularly interesting is the grouping of pathogens into chapters according to their proper means of control. The result is chapters on “water-washed diseases” (e.g., trachoma, Buruli ulcer, or lice, which are related to poor hygiene), fecal-oral diseases, food-borne diseases, diseases of soil contact, diseases of water contact, as well as other skin infections, respiratory diseases, and diseases that are transmitted by body fluids or by insects. Additional chapters detail ectoparasite zoonoses, synanthropic and domestic zoonoses, and newly emerging pathogens.

The book provides a very good integration of the environmental, vector, and host components that go into the makeup of transmission ecology for each pathogen, as it is presented. The discussion is not as detailed as would be found in larger, multi-volume textbooks, but it is concise and fairly thorough, and would provide a useful beginner’s text or field reference. Many chapters provide diagrams and summary tables that improve the effective presentation of key points. As a useful resource, the final chapter contains a summary table of more than 300 infectious pathogens and environmental hazards, along with their clinical features, incubation periods, and usual means of transmission and control. The text makes liberal use of cross-references to other sections within the book, and the book is well indexed. One major limitation that I see is the absence of any bibliography or recommendation for further reading, as is usually found in shorter texts or handbooks of this type.

Overall, this is a first-rate introduction to the challenges of infectious disease transmission and control, and it will make an excellent textbook for an introductory course in public health or on the epidemiology of infectious diseases. It lacks the depth of a full-fledged reference text, but its focus and precision provide a clear view of the essentials of a very broad range of communicable disorders, particularly those of less-developed countries.

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