

Mystery 'cocoliztli' epidemic that wiped out the Aztecs may have been caused by salmonella

In the 16th century, an epidemic known as "cocoliztli" that caused bleeding and vomiting swept through large areas of Guatemala, Mexico and even reached Peru. It wiped out 80% of the population, [killing millions](#) of people.

Ancient DNA and a new technique have been used to determine the likely cause of this mysterious epidemic that contributed to a "cataclysmic" population decline.

Salmonella genomes, which cause typhoid fever, were recovered from DNA within the teeth of 10 skeletons buried in an undisturbed "cocoliztli" or "pestilence" cemetery in Oaxaca, Mexico. This would be the first known occurrence of salmonella in the Americas, according to a new study published in the [journal Nature](#) on [January 15]. Typhoid fever has long been suspected due to the recorded symptoms, but this is the first identification of bacteria at the site.

The researchers also believe that the arrival of Europeans to what was then known as Mesoamerica caused the devastating epidemic.

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"We cannot say that it definitively caused the epidemic," [researcher Kirsten] Bos said. "It was the only pathogen that surfaced from our extensive analysis, and an enteric fever is consistent with the recorded symptoms of the epidemic. But it may not have been the only disease circulating in the population at this time. Others could have been present that were not detectable by us through the techniques we used."

Read full, original post: [Scientists identify what may have killed millions in mystery epidemic](#)