

Module 01: Demographic Catastrophe — What Happened to the Native Population After 1492?

Evidence

Pre-Contact Health

"Virgin Soil" Epidemics

The documents below will help you determine the effects of the European diseases on the inhabitants of Meso-America during the first century after Columbus "sailed the ocean blue" in 1492. The first three documents address the pre-contact health of the peoples inhabiting the Western Hemisphere. Additional documents recount virgin soil epidemics from the perspectives of the Spaniards and the native peoples inflicted by diseases unfamiliar to them. Historians researching the health and illnesses of the past often rely on what is known today about particular diseases. One document below details current knowledge about smallpox; medical knowledge of how the disease affects the body can help historians evaluate the descriptions provided by those who lived through the epidemics of the sixteenth century.

Pre-Contact Health

A [1. A Health Paradise?](#)
*The Book of
Chilam Balam of
Chumayel*



[2. Drawings: Pre-Contact Health and Medicine](#)

A [3. Native American Herbal Remedies and Medical Rituals](#)

"Virgin Soil" Epidemics

A [4. Las Casas Berating the Spaniards](#)
*History of the
Indies*



A [5. The Ten Plagues](#)
*History of the
Indians of New
Spain*

A [6. Fray Diego Duràn](#)
*Aztecs: The
History of the
Indies of New
Spain*



[7. Photos: Smallpox, the Disease](#)
Factsheet and
images

A [8. Aztec Account of the First Smallpox Epidemic](#)
*General History of
the Things New*



A [9. Smallpox in Mexico: A Spaniard's Account of Political Succession](#)
The True History

Spain

A [10. Mayan Experience With Smallpox](#)
The Annals of the Cakchiquels

A [12. Epidemics in Mexico and Central America, 1520-1595](#)

of the Conquest of Mexico

A [11. "Cocoliztli"](#)
Characteristics of epidemics