

Health & Hygiene

Sickness

In the early 1900's people tried to cure themselves if they were sick. Doctors were very expensive and 1 in 4 people died in hospital because of unsanitary conditions and lack of government funding. There was limited understanding of the way in which diseases were spread.

Unsanitary Conditions

Open cesspits were used for household and human wastes in 80% of homes. Others used the pan system that was emptied once a week by collectors. By 1899 70,000 homes were connected to the sewerage system but it flowed directly into Sydney Harbour and Bondi Beach. These conditions contributed to the spread of diseases.

Water Supply

During a drought in 1885 Sydney had only 10 days of water supply left so a new water reservoir was built in Prospect. This allowed people to use more water to wash their hands and clothes, have flushing toilets and baths. This slowly improved the hygiene of Sydney. It was an expensive service and was only available to those who could afford it.

Disease

Many people died from diseases that are easily preventable today such as Tuberculosis, pneumonia, typhoid and diarrhoea. However, in January 1900 an outbreak of the Bubonic plague occurred in Sydney. This disease, which was carried by infected rats, had 10 outbreaks in Australia over 22 years affecting 1360 people and killing 535. This led to reforms aimed at improving living standards by cleaning out slums and passing laws to reduce pollution.



Source 2.4.2

Drawing, c. 1890, of a typical Sydney back lane

SOURCE ANALYSIS

Complete these questions in your workbook.

What does this source show?
What is happening in this source?

What evidence does this source provide about health issues in cities around 1900?

How would conditions like these create problems?