

Paper 1, Question 4

Explain why there was rapid change in the prevention of smallpox in the period c1750–c1900. (12 marks)

Strong answer



Change occurred rapidly between c1750 and c1900 because of an individual – Edward Jenner – and an institution – the government. Before 1798, people attempted to prevent smallpox using inoculation. This was not a trustworthy method, as many of those who were infected with the smallpox virus died from the disease. Edward Jenner developed the world's first vaccination between 1797 and 1799, using material from sufferers of cowpox. He had observed that people who suffered from cowpox were immune to smallpox and used experiments to prove that this method worked. This was a big change in the ability to prevent smallpox.

However, Jenner's vaccination was not immediately popular due to attitudes in society. People did not trust the new method because he could not prove it with science. Many people, including inoculators and the Church, were against it. This meant that Jenner was only responsible for the rapid change in understanding how smallpox could be prevented.

It was the influence of the government that enabled the change to occur rapidly. From the start of the 19th century the government funded and encouraged vaccination programmes. For example, in 1807 they asked the Royal College of Physicians to organise vaccination nationwide and in 1852 they made the vaccination compulsory. Some historians argue that the big change occurred after 1867, when the vaccination was properly enforced.

Therefore, the change in understanding of how to prevent smallpox occurred when Jenner invented the vaccination; however, this did not become a rapid change until the government backed its use from the middle of the 19th century. Deaths from smallpox fell by approximately 85% between 1850 and 1880. This shows that the vaccination was successful in preventing outbreaks.

This answer is consistently analytical with a clear focus on the question throughout. Information is precisely selected to support the points made. There is a clear line of reasoning. The candidate has addressed the question directly in the conclusion, distinguishing between change and rapid change and making a judgement about the most important factor.

Verdict

This is a good answer because:

- it has included only relevant information
- the line of reasoning is consistently developed throughout the answer, with a strong focus on the factors
- there is a concluding paragraph that sums up the precise cause of rapid change.