

The Little Ice Age

Western Europe experienced a general cooling of the climate after the year 1150 and a very cold climate between 1560 and 1850 that brought dire consequences to its peoples. The period from 1150 to 1850 is sometimes called the Little Ice Age.

During this time, the cooler air of the Arctic began to spread southward. Together with other changes in the atmosphere over the North Atlantic, this directed a higher number of storms into northern Europe. The sea level seems to have been increased by ice melt during the preceding Medieval Warm Period (from about 900 to 1150), contributing to the flooding which caused the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. Additionally, hail wiped out farmland and killed great numbers of livestock over much of Europe, due to very cold air during the warmer months. Glaciers in many parts of Europe began to advance, destroying farmland and causing massive flooding.

The climate change of the Little Ice Age had a serious impact on agriculture, as it reduced the growing season by up to two months. That is enough to affect almost any type of food production, especially crops highly adapted to use the full-season warm climatic periods. Varieties of seeds that can withstand extreme cold or warmth, wetness or dryness, were not available in the past. The impact on agricultural output was significant, with poor harvests leading to high food prices and famines. In one of the worst famines, millions of people died in France and neighbouring countries in 1693. Food prices reached a peak in the year 1816 – ‘the year without a summer’.

The cooler climate during the Little Ice Age had a huge impact on the health of Europeans. Malnutrition led to a weakened immunity to a variety of illnesses, including bubonic plague – the Black Death – which killed a third of the population of Europe in the late 1340s. Cool, wet summers led to outbreaks of an illness called St Anthony's Fire, which caused terrible suffering, hallucinations and even death. This was due to a fungus which develops in grain stored in cool, damp conditions. Used to make bread, the grain passed the illness to whole villages.

Complete the summary below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

The Impact of the Little Ice Age

The increase in cold air affecting Europe led to more frequent **0** *storms* in the north of the continent. The sea level rose because of **1** caused earlier, and this led to **2** in which many people died. Animals and crops were destroyed by **3** in the summer. As the climate cooled, **4** spread, causing great destruction.

In agriculture, the Little Ice Age led to a shorter **5**, which had a particular impact on **6** that need long periods of warmth. A further problem was that **7** were more vulnerable than those of today. In consequence, **8** were poor. Large numbers of people died in the **9** that occurred in several countries. In addition, **10** reduced many people's immunity to diseases. One illness, St Anthony's Fire, was caused by a **11** that could grow in bread.