



Film blog

Matt Hancock's vaccine rollout was inspired by Contagion. Here's what he should watch next



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Like many people, one of the first things I did after the March lockdown in the UK was watch [Steven Soderbergh's 2011 film Contagion](#). I was completely clueless about the nature of infectious diseases, and I was foolish enough to hope that a Hollywood film might provide the answers.

Which is a tremendously stupid thing to do, I'll admit. The world is full of extraordinary epidemiologists who have dedicated their careers to researching and preparing for the sort of global pandemic that has brought humanity to its knees. If I had actually been interested in learning anything about Covid, I could have read some of their papers, or watched some of their interviews. But no. Instead I watched a made-up film about a made-up disease because, in part, it starred several pretty women. What an idiot. What an absolute, unforgivable bonehead I was for thinking that it would be of any use whatsoever.

Anyway, it turns out that Matt Hancock did the same thing. Speaking to LBC this week, Hancock revealed that viewing [Contagion](#) had influenced his vaccine policy. "In the film, it shows that the moment of highest stress around the vaccine

programme is not before it's rolled out – when the scientists and manufacturers work together at pace – it's afterwards when there is a huge row about the order of priority," he said.

To be clear, Hancock also pointed out that Contagion wasn't his primary source of advice. But still, it's troubling that the people in charge of disaster response turned to Hollywood in a time of historic crisis. We already know that Boris Johnson has cited Larry Vaughn, the shark-denying, catastrophe-baiting mayor of Amity Island, as a figure to look up when times are rough. But what next?



▲ Explosive ... Pierce Brosnan and Linda Hamilton in Dante's Peak. Photograph: CineText/Sportsphoto/Allstar

Recent analysis from Nasa has suggested that the Earth might be struck by a skyscraper-sized asteroid known as 99942 Apophis in 2068, resulting in an explosion 20 times larger than the biggest nuclear bomb ever detonated. Does this mean that, somewhere in Whitehall, high-level civil servants are watching Michael Bay's Armageddon and drawing up a list of handsome and charismatic miners they can send into space to blow it up? The Earth is long overdue a cataclysmic super-volcanic eruption. Does that mean that experts are huddled around a DVD of Dante's Peak? Seismologists repeatedly warn of a devastating earthquake along the San Andreas fault. Does this mean that scientists are preparing to breed a clone army of Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson to take it down?

That said, Contagion wasn't entirely useless. There's a helpful scene where Kate Winslet explains R numbers with a clarity that real-life scientists and politicians have struggled to match. Jude Law's conspiracy-theory character neatly predicted the harrowing effects of misinformation on a frightened population. And, yes, the

vaccination segment was relatively insightful. In the film, the vaccination rollout hits a bottleneck and governments have to resort to a birthday lottery to get things moving again. The UK has avoided this so far, because it ordered its vaccines earlier and in larger quantities than was recommended.

Indeed, when you look back at just how badly Britain botched every element of the pandemic - except for the one that was specifically influenced by a film - perhaps I'm being much too hard on Contagion. In fact, is there any chance we can have [Steven Soderbergh](#) as health secretary?

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