

What is cholera?

Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine a germ: the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but sometimes it can be severe. Approximately 1 in 10 infected persons has severe disease characterized by profuse watery diarrhea, vomiting, and leg cramps. In these persons, rapid loss of body fluids leads to dehydration and shock. Without treatment, death can occur within hours.

Where is cholera found?

The cholera bacterium is usually found in water or food sources that have been contaminated by feces (poop) from a person infected with cholera. Cholera is most likely to be found and spread in places with inadequate water treatment, poor sanitation, and inadequate hygiene.

The cholera bacterium may also live in the environment in brackish rivers and coastal waters. Shellfish eaten raw have been a source of cholera, and a few persons in the United States have contracted cholera after eating raw or undercooked shellfish sourced from Gulf Coast waters.

How does a person get cholera?

A person can get cholera by drinking water or eating food contaminated with the cholera bacterium. In an epidemic, the source of the contamination is usually the feces of an infected person that contaminates water and/or food. The disease can spread rapidly in areas with inadequate treatment of sewage and drinking water. The disease is not likely to spread directly from one person to another; therefore, casual contact with an infected person is not a risk for becoming ill.

While cholera is a rare disease, those who might be at risk include people traveling to parts of Latin America, Africa, or Asia where outbreaks are occurring, and people who consume raw or undercooked seafood from warm coastal waters subject to sewage contamination.

What are the symptoms of cholera?

People exposed to cholera might experience mild to severe diarrhea, occasional vomiting, and dehydration.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can appear within a few hours to 5 days after exposure, usually 2-3 days.

What is the treatment for cholera?

Because of the rapid dehydration that may result from severe diarrhea, replacement of fluids by mouth or intravenous route is critical. Antibiotics, such as tetracycline, may be used to shorten the duration of diarrhea and excretion of the organism.

Is there a vaccine for cholera?

A single-dose, live attenuated monovalent oral vaccine (CVD 103-HgR; Vaxchora) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and is available in the United States for use for travelers 2 through 64 years of age who are traveling to areas where cholera is a risk. An area of active cholera transmission is defined as a province, state, or other administrative subdivision within a country with endemic or epidemic cholera caused by toxigenic *V. cholerae* and includes areas with cholera activity within the past year that are prone to recurrence of cholera epidemics; it does not include areas where only rare sporadic cases have been reported. CDC provides a [list of countries](#) with active cholera transmission.

How can cholera be prevented?

The risk for cholera is low for U.S. travelers visiting areas with epidemic cholera. With simple precautions, contracting the disease is unlikely.

All people (visitors or residents) in areas where cholera is occurring or has occurred should observe the following recommendations:

- Drink and use safe water. Piped water, drinks sold in cups or bags, and ice may not be safe.
 - Use bottled water with unbroken seals to drink, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, and make ice or beverages. If bottled water is not available, use water that has been properly chlorinated, boiled, or filtered.
 - If treating with a chlorine product, treat your water with one of the locally available chlorine treatment products for drinking water and follow the instructions on the label.
 - If a chlorine treatment product isn't available, boiling is an effective way to make water safe. Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute. Note that boiled water is at risk for recontamination and should be safely stored in a clean, covered container.
 - If filtering your water, use a filter with a pore size of less than or equal to 0.3 microns and treat the water with a disinfectant such as chlorine, chlorine dioxide, or iodine. Note that filtered water is at risk for recontamination and should be safely stored in a clean, covered container. Additional treatment with a chlorine product is recommended.
- Wash your hands often with soap and safe water. If you don't have access to soap and safe water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. It's recommended to wash your hands:
 - Before, during, and after preparing food.
 - Before and after eating food or feeding your children.
 - After using the toilet.
 - After cleaning your child's bottom.
 - After taking care of someone who is sick with diarrhea.
- Use toilets or safely managed sanitation facilities to get rid of poop. This includes disposing of your children's poop. Wash your hands with soap and safe water after going to the bathroom. If you don't have access to a toilet:
 - Poop at least 30 meters (100 feet) away from any body of water, including wells, and then bury your poop.
 - Dispose of plastic bags containing poop in latrines or at collection points if available. Or bury the bags in the ground.
 - Do not put plastic bags in chemical toilets.
 - Dig new latrines or temporary pit toilets at least a half-meter (1.6 feet) deep and at least 30 meters (100 feet) away from any body of water.
- Eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot and steaming, or fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself. Avoid eating raw vegetables and fruits that can't be peeled. Be sure to cook seafood, especially shellfish, until it is very hot all the way through.
 - A simple rule of thumb is, "Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it."

- Thoroughly and safely clean.
 - Clean and disinfect kitchenware and areas where you prepare food with soap and safe water. Allow them to dry completely.
 - Bathe and wash clothes or diapers 30 meters (100 feet) from drinking water sources.
 - Clean and disinfect toilets and surfaces contaminated with poop. Clean surfaces with a soap solution to remove poop, then disinfect using a solution of 1 part of household bleach to 9 parts of water.
 - When finished cleaning, safely dispose of soapy water and disinfection solutions by pouring them into a drain, toilet, or latrine.
 - Dirty rags can be cleaned with hot water and soap and allowed to fully dry. Wash your hands again with soap and safe water after cleaning and disinfecting.

For more information, please visit these websites:

- CDC Cholera: www.cdc.gov/cholera
- World Health Organization: www.who.int/health-topics/cholera
- Pan-American Health Organization: www.paho.org/en/topics/cholera