

What is cholera?

Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but sometimes it can be severe. Approximately 1 in 20 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 from the Gulf of Mexico.

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?

CDC does not recommend cholera vaccines for most travelers, nor is the vaccine available in the United States. This is because the available vaccines offer incomplete protection for a relatively short period of time. There are no cholera vaccination requirements for entry or exit in any Latin American country or the United States.

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 only bottled, boiled, or chemically treated water and bottled or canned carbonated beverages. When using bottled drinks, make sure that the seal has not been broken.
 - To disinfect your own water: boil for 1 minute or filter the water and add 2 drops of household bleach or ½ an iodine tablet per liter of water.
 - Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes.
- Wash your hands often with soap and clean water.
- If no water and soap are available, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner (with at least 60% alcohol).
 - Clean your hands especially before you eat or prepare food and after using the bathroom.
- Use bottled, boiled, or chemically treated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, or make ice.
- Eat foods that are packaged or that are freshly cooked and served hot.
 - Do not eat raw and undercooked meats and seafood or unpeeled fruits and vegetables.
- Dispose of feces in a sanitary manner to prevent contamination of water and food sources.

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