



Cholera

What is Cholera?

Cholera is a disease that causes diarrhea. A person can get Cholera by eating or drinking food or water that has a bacteria called *Vibrio cholerae* in it.

How is Cholera spread?

Cholera bacteria are usually found in water or food 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 poor water treatment, poor sanitation, and hygiene. You can become infected by:

- drinking contaminated water
- eating contaminated food such as raw or undercooked shellfish and fish, moist grains held at room temperature and raw or partially dried fish
- unintentionally ingesting feces from an infected person

What symptoms should I watch for?

Cholera may cause a variety of symptoms, including:

- profuse but painless watery, white-tinged diarrhea with flakes of mucus (rice water stools)
- vomiting of clear fluid
- nausea

Most people infected with cholera do not have any symptoms, but they can still pass the bacteria to others. About 5-10% of infected people will experience severe symptoms. If not treated, an infected person can rapidly lose bodily fluids which can lead to severe dehydration, shock, and death.

Symptoms of cholera may appear from 6 hours to 5 days after exposure but usually appear within 2-3 days. If you have signs and symptoms of illness, and you have had exposure to possible sources of cholera, contact a physician.

What is the treatment for Cholera?

Cholera can be treated by immediate intravenous fluid replacement. With prompt rehydration, less than 1% of cholera patients die.

Antibiotics shorten the course and decrease the severity of the illness, but they are not as important as receiving rehydration. People who develop severe diarrhea and vomiting in countries where cholera occurs should seek medical attention immediately.

How do I protect myself and others?

When traveling to places at risk of cholera, use the following preventative measures:

- Consult with a travel clinic regarding vaccination recommendations before travel.
- Thorough hand washing before preparing or consuming foods.
- Make sure hands are properly washed with safe water after using the toilet, changing diapers, or after assisting others with the toilet.
- Only drinking water that you know is not contaminated. If you are not sure, treat the water yourself (e.g. boil the water for at least five minutes). Chlorinate or boil water that will be used for drinking, cooking, washing dishes, washing hands and brushing teeth (Travelers can obtain products for disinfecting water from pharmacies).
- Ensure ice is made from uncontaminated water.
- Avoid eating raw oysters and undercooked shellfish and fish as well as food from street vendors.
- Disinfect linens and articles if soiled by feces or vomitus with heat, bleach, or other disinfectants.

Remember these simple rules: Boil it, cook it, peel it or forget it.

For information call Infectious Diseases: ext. 8809.