

Cholera

What is cholera?

Cholera is a bacterial disease that affects the intestinal tract causing diarrhea. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but sometimes it can be severe.

What are the symptoms of cholera?

Symptoms usually appear two to three days after exposure and include sudden onset of severe watery diarrhea, occasional vomiting and cramping, and dehydration.

Approximately 5% of infected persons will have severe disease with symptoms of profuse watery diarrhea, vomiting, and leg cramps. In severe untreated cases, death may occur due to dehydration from the rapid loss of body fluids. In addition to these symptoms, children infected with cholera may also experience extreme drowsiness, fever, convulsion, and coma. Symptoms typically appear 2-3 days after exposure.

How is cholera spread?

The cholera bacteria are passed in feces. Generally, people are infected by eating or drinking food or water contaminated by fecal waste. This occurs most often in underdeveloped countries lacking adequate water supplies and proper sewage disposal. Infection can also occur by eating raw or undercooked seafood from polluted waters. Problems can also arise when foods are contaminated by dirty water, feces, soiled hands, or flies.

The disease is not likely to spread from one person to another; therefore casual contact with an infected person is not a risk for becoming ill with cholera.

How common is cholera?

Cholera is rare in the United States but more common in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The biggest risk for contracting cholera occurs when people travel in those continents.

What is the treatment for cholera?

Due to the rapid dehydration that may result from severe diarrhea, replacement of fluids and salts by mouth or intravenously is critical. Antibiotics may also be prescribed to shorten the duration of diarrhea and shedding of bacteria in the stool.

How can cholera be prevented?

At the present time, the cholera vaccine is no longer available in the United States. It is not recommended for travelers because it provides incomplete protection for a relatively short period of time.

When traveling in areas where cholera is present, follow basic precautions:

- Drink only bottled water, carbonated water, or boiled water.
- If tap water is the only source, boil for 1 minute or filter and treat water with 2

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drops of chlorine.

- Avoid drinks with ice that may have been made with untreated water.
- Wash your hands often with soap and clean water. If no soap and water are available, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid uncooked vegetables or fruit. Fruit with intact peels that you can peel yourself are safe (e.g., bananas and oranges).
- Avoid raw and undercooked meats, particularly seafood.
- Eat only cooked foods that are served hot.
- After cooking or boiling food and water, protect against contamination by flies.
- Avoid food and drinks from street vendors.
- Use bottled, boiled, or chemically treated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, or make ice.

How do I get more information on cholera?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Web Site: <http://www.cdc.gov/cholera/general/>

Phone: 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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