

CHOLERA FACT SHEET

What is cholera?

Cholera is a diarrhea illness caused by an infection with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. It is primarily an intestinal infection. Many people with cholera do not have any symptoms or their symptoms are mild. However cholera can be a serious illness and severe, untreated cholera may cause death. Cholera is not common in the United States or other industrialized countries.

How do you get it?

The cholera bacteria live in brackish coastal waters. People become infected with cholera by swallowing water or food contaminated with the bacteria. People can become infected by coming into contact with the stool or vomit of a person infected with cholera. Anyone can get cholera, but those at greatest risk are international travelers visiting countries where cholera is common (parts of Latin America, Africa and Asia).

What are the symptoms?

A person infected with cholera may have no symptoms, or they may have mild diarrhea and abdominal cramping. People with severe cholera will have very severe watery diarrhea, vomiting and leg cramping. This rapid loss of fluid may cause dehydration and shock.

How soon do infected people get sick?

People who develop symptoms will become sick either from a few hours after exposure to as long as 5 days. Usually people will get sick in 2-3 days.

What should I do if I think I have been exposed to cholera?

Treatment is necessary in severe cases, and rapid fluid replacement is the treatment of choice. If you are having symptoms of cholera and you have recently traveled to other countries where cholera is common, you should contact your doctor. People who require rapid fluid replacement may need to be hospitalized. Antibiotics can be used but they are not as important as fluid replacement.

How can we prevent cholera?

All travelers going to countries where cholera has occurred should observe the following recommendations:

- drink only boiled or carbonated, bottled water
- eat only foods that have been thoroughly cooked and still hot, avoid salads.
- eat only fruit that you can peel yourself
- avoid raw or undercooked fish and shellfish
- do not buy food or beverages from street vendors.

Hand washing is also an important way to prevent or reduce transmission of any disease that can be transmitted from person to person.

Where can I get more information on cholera?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)