

CHOLERA FACTSHEET

What is Cholera?

Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the toxigenic bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* serogroup O1 or O139.

Who can get Cholera?

Anyone can get Cholera, but people living in places with unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, and inadequate hygiene are at the highest risk. Cholera is very rare in the United States.

What are the symptoms of Cholera?

Cholera infection is often mild or without symptoms but can be severe. Approximately 1 in 10 people who get sick with cholera will develop severe symptoms such as watery diarrhea, vomiting, and leg cramps. In these people, rapid loss of body fluids leads to dehydration and shock. Without treatment, death can occur within hours.

How soon do symptoms appear?

It usually takes 2-3 days for symptoms to appear after a person ingests cholera bacteria, but the time can range from a few hours to 5 days.

How does someone get Cholera?

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

How is Cholera treated?

Cholera is treated by immediately replacing the fluid and salts lost through diarrhea. Patients can be treated with

oral rehydration solution. With rapid rehydration, less than 1% of cholera patients die. Antibiotics reduce the time you are ill and the severity of your illness, but they are not as important as receiving rehydration. Persons who develop severe diarrhea and vomiting in countries where cholera occurs should seek medical attention promptly.

How can people protect themselves against Cholera?

Be aware of whether cholera cases have recently occurred in an area you plan to visit. Travelers should follow recommendations to avoid getting sick, such as:

- Only drink bottled, boiled, or chemically treated water and bottled or canned carbonated beverages.
- Wash your hands often with soap and clean water, especially before you eat or prepare food and after using the bathroom. If no water and soap are available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Use bottled, boiled, or chemically treated water to wash dishes, brush teeth, wash and prepare food, and make ice.
- Only eat foods that are freshly cooked and served hot. Do not eat raw or undercooked meats and seafood, or raw or undercooked fruits and vegetables unless they are peeled.

Several vaccines exist for Cholera, but they are not available in the United States. These vaccines may be available at your travel destination or if you're living outside the United States.

Where can I get more information?

Information about Cholera and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of District residents. For additional information, please <https://dchealth.dc.gov> or call (202) 442-9021.