

What is cholera?

Cholera is an acute diarrhea disease caused by toxins produced by *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria.

Who is at risk?

Any person who ingests food or water contaminated by the bacteria is at risk of becoming ill. Those traveling to areas where cholera is more common and those with weakened immune systems are at an increased risk of becoming ill.

How is cholera spread?

V. cholerae is usually transmitted through the ingestion of food or water contaminated (directly or indirectly) by stool or vomit of infected persons (e.g., via sewage) or by ingestion of raw or undercooked seafood harvested from polluted waters.

What are the symptoms of cholera?

Most individuals infected with cholera develop mild illness involving only diarrhea. Less common are infected individuals that develop more severe illnesses characterized by profuse watery stools, nausea, some vomiting and leg cramps. These symptoms may become more severe because of rapid loss of body fluids and dehydration. Shock can occur in the most severe cases. Without rehydration therapy, death may occur within hours if severe illness is untreated. With proper treatment, the risk of fatal illness is significantly reduced.

How is cholera diagnosed?

Often the diagnosis is made by either isolation of the bacteria in the stool or laboratory testing for evidence of infection through a blood test.

How is cholera treated?

When diarrhea is present, aggressive fluid replacement is an important part of treatment. In addition, a physician may prescribe certain antibiotics.

How can cholera be prevented?

Although the risk of cholera infection is low in the United States, travelers to coastal regions and those traveling to areas where cholera is typically found are at an increased risk of becoming ill.

General Tips:

- Do not eat raw or undercooked fish or shellfish, including ceviche.
- Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating or preparing food, after using the toilet, and after changing diapers.
- After changing diapers, wash the child's hands and your own.
- In a child care, dispose of feces in a sanitary manner.

When traveling:

- "Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it."
- Drink only bottled or boiled water, keeping in mind that bottled carbonated water is safer than uncarbonated water.
- Ask for drinks without ice unless the ice is made from bottled or boiled water.
- Avoid popsicles and flavored ices that may have been made with contaminated water.
- Eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and that are still hot and steaming.
- Avoid raw vegetables and fruits that cannot be peeled. Vegetables like lettuce are easily contaminated and are very hard to wash well.
- Peel your own raw fruits or vegetables and do not eat the peelings.
- Avoid foods and beverages from street vendors.
- Do not bring any perishable food back to the United States.