



## CHOLERA

### What is CHOLERA?

Cholera is an intestinal disease caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*, serogroup O1 or O139. Although most cases of cholera are seen in areas such as Asia, Africa and South America, a few cases occur in the United States each year. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but sometimes it can be severe.

### What are the symptoms of cholera?

Most people exposed to the organism will not develop any symptoms. The most common symptom is mild to severe watery diarrhea, and sometimes nausea and vomiting. In untreated cases, death may occur within a few hours due to severe dehydration. With proper treatment, few people die from cholera.

### Who gets cholera?

People who travel to foreign countries where outbreaks are occurring are at risk for getting cholera. Additionally, people who eat raw or undercooked seafood from contaminated warm coastal waters are at risk. In both instances, the risk of getting cholera is quite small.

### How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms can occur within a few hours to 5 days after exposure, usually within 2-3 days.

### Where are the bacteria that cause cholera found?

*Vibrio cholerae* is found in the feces of people (with or without symptoms) infected with the bacteria. The bacterium may also live in the environment in brackish rivers and coastal waters.

### What is the treatment for cholera?

The most important treatment is fluid replacement. Often, drinking large volumes of water is adequate. However, intravenous (I.V.) fluids may be necessary. Antibiotics are also used to shorten the duration and diminish the severity of diarrhea, but they are not as important as fluid hydration.

### Is there a vaccine for cholera?

There is no vaccine available for the prevention of cholera.

### What are some preventive measures?

When traveling in countries where cholera is present, only eat thoroughly cooked hot foods, fruits that you can peel yourself, and drink bottled drinks or chlorinated water. Avoid salads and food or drinks from street vendors. Thorough handwashing is important in preventing the spread of the bacteria.