

Cholera

Fact Sheet

What is Cholera?

Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. An estimated 3-5 million cases and over 100,000 deaths occur each year around the world. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but can sometimes be severe. Approximately one in 20 (5%) infected persons will have severe disease characterized by profuse 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 Can One Get Cholera?

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

What are the Symptoms of Cholera?

Cholera infection is often mild or without symptoms, but can sometimes be severe. Approximately one in 20 (5%) infected persons will have severe disease characterized by profuse 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.

Who is Most Likely to Get Cholera?

Individuals living in places with inadequate water treatment, poor sanitation, and inadequate hygiene are at a greater risk for cholera.

How is Cholera Treated?

Cholera can be simply and successfully treated by immediate replacement of the fluid and salts lost through diarrhea. Patients can be treated with oral rehydration solution, a prepackaged mixture of sugar and salts to be mixed with water and drunk in large amounts. This solution is used throughout the world to treat diarrhea. Severe cases also require intravenous fluid replacement. With prompt rehydration, fewer than 1% of cholera patients die.

Antibiotics shorten the course and diminish the severity of the 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.

Is There a Vaccine for Cholera?

Currently, there are two oral cholera vaccines available, Dukoral (manufactured by SBL Vaccines) which is World Health Organization (WHO) prequalified and licensed in over 60 countries, and

If you have any questions, please contact Allen County Public Health at 419-228-4457. Health Department staff members are available to answer your questions Monday to Friday from 8:00a.m. to 4:30 p.m. You can also visit www.allencountypublichealth.org and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site at www.bt.cdc.gov for additional information.

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ShanChol (manufactured by Shantha Biotec in India), which is licensed in India and is pending WHO prequalification. Because the vaccine is a two dose vaccine, multiple weeks can elapse before persons receiving the vaccine are protected. Therefore, vaccination should not replace standard prevention and control measures. In addition, CDC does not recommend cholera vaccines for most travelers, nor is the vaccine available in the U.S.. This is because the available vaccines offer incomplete protection for a relatively short period of time.

Further information about Dukoral can be obtained from the manufacturers:

Dukoral®
SBL Vaccin AB,
SE-105 21 Stockholm, Sweden
telephone +46-8-7351000
website: www.sblvaccines.se

Is Cholera Common in the United States?

In the U.S., cholera was prevalent in the 1800s but water-related spread has been eliminated by modern water and sewage treatment systems.

However, U.S. travelers to areas with epidemic cholera (for example, parts of Africa, Asia, or Latin America) may be exposed to the cholera bacterium. In addition, travelers may bring contaminated seafood back to the U.S.; foodborne outbreaks of cholera have been caused by contaminated seafood brought into the U.S. by travelers.

How is the Government Working to Combat Cholera?

U.S. and international public health authorities are working to enhance surveillance for cholera, investigate cholera outbreaks, and design and implement preventive measures across the globe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) investigates epidemic cholera wherever it occurs at the invitation of the affected country and trains laboratory workers in proper techniques for identification of *Vibrio cholerae*. In addition, CDC provides information on diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of cholera to public health officials and educates the public about effective preventive measures.

The U.S. Agency for International Development sponsors some of the international U.S. government activities and provides medical supplies, and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies to affected countries.

The Food and Drug Administration tests imported and domestic shellfish for *V. cholerae* and monitors the safety of U.S. shellfish beds through the shellfish sanitation program.

With cooperation at the state and local, national, and international levels, assistance will be provided to countries where cholera is present. The risk to U.S. residents remains small.

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