



LIBERTY

BLUE HEALTH COVER

What you need to know about cholera

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Cholera is a challenge in countries where access to safe drinking water and hygienic sanitation cannot be guaranteed. Almost every developing country faces the threat of a cholera epidemic. To prevent and manage the disease, it's important that you know how to recognise the symptoms, how to prevent it, and how it can be treated.



What is cholera?

Cholera is a severe, diarrhoeal illness caused by infection of the intestine. The infection can be minor and without symptoms, but is often severe and life threatening.



What are cholera symptoms?

The symptoms of cholera are:

- Severe watery diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Muscle cramps
- Dehydration and collapse

If someone is seriously affected, a rapid loss of body fluids can lead to dehydration and shock. Without treatment, death can occur within hours.



How do you get cholera?

The main cause of the disease is drinking water and eating food that is infected with cholera bacterium.

In the case of a cholera outbreak, the source of the infection is usually faeces (stools) of infected persons. The disease can spread rapidly in areas with poor treatment of sewage and drinking water. It is worsened by overcrowding and poor personal hygiene.

Cholera bacterium can also be found in dirty rivers and coastal waters. Raw shellfish have specifically been identified as a source of cholera.

You cannot get the disease from casual contact with someone who is infected, because the disease does not spread directly from one person to another.



Can cholera be treated?

The good news is that it is easy to treat cholera successfully. The best way to do this is by immediately replacing the fluid and salts lost due to diarrhoea. Serious cases require intravenous fluid replacement.

It is important to note that while the use of medicine shortens the course of the illness and reduces cholera's severity, this is not as important as rehydration. People who develop severe diarrhoea and vomiting should seek medical attention quickly.

With quick treatment, less than 1% of cholera patients die.



What you can do to avoid getting cholera

If you follow these simple precautions, you are not likely to contract the disease:

- Wash your hands often and always before preparing food or eating.
- Only drink boiled or treated water. Other safe beverages include tea and coffee made with boiled water and fizzy bottled beverages without ice.
- Only eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked.
- Only eat fruit that you have peeled yourself.
- Make sure that all vegetables are cooked, and avoid salads with vegetables that have not been washed.
- Avoid foods and beverages from street vendors.

A simple rule of thumb is: Boil it, cook it, peel it ... or forget it.

Source: <http://www.medicinenet.com/cholera/article.htm>

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