



July 2011

Cholera

What is cholera?

Cholera is an acute intestinal infection caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*. This infection can lead to severe dehydration. The disease occurs in areas such as Asia, Africa, South and Central America and Mexico.

What are the symptoms of cholerae?

Some people do not develop any symptoms. Others may experience mild to severe watery diarrhea, vomiting and dehydration. Fever is usually absent. If left untreated, dehydration can become so severe that it can result in death within a few hours. The mortality rate can be as high as 50%.

Symptoms can appear anywhere from a few hours to five days after exposure to the bacteria, but usually develop within two to three days.

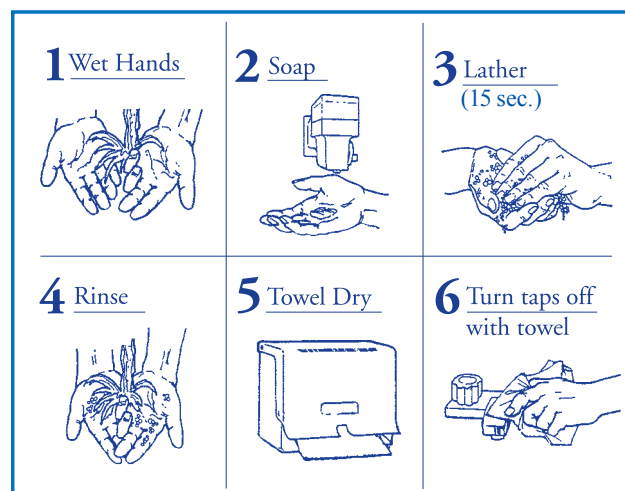
How does cholera spread?

A person can become infected with cholera by eating food or swallowing water that has been contaminated by the feces from an infected person. Most people get cholera by drinking unsafe water (beverages prepared with contaminated water, ice and even commercial bottled water) or eating raw or undercooked food (e.g., shellfish). People that have low stomach acid are at increased risk for cholera. Severe cholera has been shown to occur more often in people with blood group O.

How can cholera be prevented?

Cholera can be prevented through the following measures:

- **Practise good hand hygiene.** This is the most effective way to stop the spread of cholera. Wash hands frequently for at least 15 seconds using the 6-step method, and especially:
 - after using the washroom
 - after changing diapers
 - before preparing or eating food
- Do not prepare food or handle water for others if you have diarrhea
- Drink water from a safe supply. Chlorinate or boil water used for drinking, cooking and washing dishes
- Disinfect linens and items used by patients (if soiled by feces or vomit) with heat, carbolic acid or other disinfectants
- Dispose feces directly into municipal sewers. If disposing feces into private sewage systems, disinfect as required
- Avoid ice unless it has been made with safe water
- Boil unpasteurized milk



For further information, please call:
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- Thoroughly cook crabs, oysters and other shellfish before eating (boil or steam at least 10 minutes)
- Promptly refrigerate foods such as fish, rice or grain gruels after meals and reheat thoroughly before eating
- Ask your doctor about getting vaccinated. An oral vaccine to prevent cholera is available and is sometimes recommended for selected high risk, short-term (protection is for 3 months) travellers to certain foreign countries where cholera is occurring

What is the treatment for cholera?

Treatment should be under the direction of your family doctor. People with mild to moderate cases of cholera should be treated by drinking fluids mixed with salts and sugars. In severe cases of cholera, antibiotics may also be needed.

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