

Cholera Fact Sheet

1. **What is cholera?** - Cholera is a diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestinal tract with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. An estimated 3-5 million cases and over 100,000 deaths occur annually around the world. Currently, only a few cases are recognized in the United States each year.
2. **Where is cholera found?** – The cholera bacterium is usually found in water or food sources that have been contaminated with feces from an infected person. Cholera is most likely to be found and spread in places with inadequate water treatment, poor sanitation and inadequate personal hygiene. The cholera bacterium also may also be found in the environment in brackish rivers and coastal waters. Previously, shellfish eaten raw have been a common source of cholera infection, and a few persons in the United States have contracted cholera after eating raw or undercooked shellfish from the Gulf of Mexico. Those who may be at risk include people traveling to foreign countries where outbreaks are occurring and people who consume raw or undercooked seafood especially filter feeding shellfish from warm coastal waters subject to sewage contamination.
3. **How is the disease spread?** - The cholera bacterium is passed in the feces. It is spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated by the fecal waste of an infected person. This occurs more often in underdeveloped countries lacking adequate water supplies and proper sewage disposal.
4. **What are the symptoms of cholera?** - Cholera can produce very severe watery diarrhea, vomiting and dehydration. Fever is usually absent. Classic cholera produces diarrhea that is described as “rice-water” in appearance.
5. **How soon do symptoms appear?** - The symptoms may occur within a few hours to five days after exposure. However, symptoms typically appear in 2 to 3 days.
6. **What is the treatment for cholera?** - Rapid dehydration may result from severe diarrhea. Cholera can be simply and successfully treated with oral rehydration solution, a pre-packaged formulation of sugar and salts to be mixed with water and drunk in large amounts. Replacement of fluids by mouth or by intravenous route is critical for survival. Antibiotics, such as tetracycline, are also used to shorten the duration of diarrhea and shedding of the bacteria in the feces. Properly treated, less than 1% of cholera cases are fatal.
7. **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 ShanChol (manufactured by Shantha Biotech 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, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does



not recommend cholera vaccines for most travelers, nor is the vaccine available in the United States. This is because the available vaccines offer incomplete protection for a relatively short period of time.

8. **How can cholera be prevented?** - The single most important preventive measure is to avoid consuming foods and/or water where cholera occurs unless they are known to be safe or have been properly treated.
9. **For more information about Cholera:** <http://www.cdc.gov/cholera/index.html>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician for specific clinical information.