

Cholera- Factsheet

What is cholera?

Cholera is caused by a bacterium, typically found in intestines or stomach, and occasionally causes sepsis.

What are the symptoms of a cholera infection?

The most common symptoms are mild to moderate diarrhea and vomiting. The symptoms generally appear 1 to 3 days after exposure.

How is cholera spread?

Cholera bacteria may be spread by eating contaminated or “dirty” water or food (particularly fish or shellfish). Infected persons can spread the bacteria by not washing their hands after going to the bathroom and then handling food. Direct contact with stool (feces) from an infected person or animal and transferred to the mouth from the hands may also cause infection.

How long are people contagious?

Most persons carry the bacteria for only a few days after illness. A small percentage of infected persons carry the bacteria for a year or longer.

Who gets cholera?

Anyone who has contact with contaminated water or persons can get cholera. However, people with low gastric acid and blood group O are at increased risk.

What treatment is available for people with cholera?

Hydration therapy is recommended for persons with diarrhea. Antimicrobial therapy is recommended for people who are moderately to severely ill. However, administration of appropriate antibiotics within 24 hours of identifying an index case can prevent additional cases.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

Since the bacteria is found in stool, children should not go to daycare or school while they have diarrhea and food handlers should be excluded from work. Daycare attendees and workers may return to the daycare setting once they are asymptomatic.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting cholera?

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap, and especially after using the toilet, changing a diaper or before preparing and/or eating food. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Purify drinking water.
- Avoid food or water from sources that may be contaminated.
- Always treat raw meats as if they are contaminated and handle accordingly.

- Wrap fresh meats in plastic bags at the market to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
- Refrigerate foods promptly; minimize time kept at room temperature.
- Immediately wash cutting boards and counters used for preparation to prevent cross contamination with other foods.
- Ensure that the correct internal cooking temperature is reached, particularly when cooking in a microwave.