

Cholera

FACTSHEET

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Division of Epidemiology, Disease Surveillance and Investigation
899 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 580
Washington, D.C. 20002
202-442-9371 Fax 202-442-8060
www.dchealth.dc.gov

What is Cholera?

Cholera is an acute diarrheal illness caused by a bacterial infection of the intestine (bowel). The risk for developing cholera in the United States is low.

Who gets Cholera?

While cholera is a rare disease, those who may be at risk include people traveling to foreign countries where disease occurs. The disease has also occurred in people who have eaten raw or undercooked seafood from warm coastal waters that had been contaminated with sewage.

What are the symptoms of Cholera?

The symptoms of cholera include mild to severe watery diarrhea, vomiting, and leg cramps. Fever is usually absent. Some people infected with this disease have very mild symptoms, or no symptoms at all.

How is Cholera spread?

The cholera bacteria is passed in the stools. It is spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated by the stool of an infected person. This occurs most often in underdeveloped countries lacking adequate water supplies and proper sewage disposal. The disease is not likely to be spread from one person to another. Some individuals have become ill from eating raw or undercooked shellfish.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear from six hours to five days after exposure.

Is a person with Cholera contagious?

The bacteria that causes cholera is passed in the stool of an infected person. The disease is not likely to be spread directly from one person to another.

How is Cholera treated?

The most important treatment for cholera is the replacement of the body's fluids as a result of the watery diarrhea. Antibiotics shorten the length and severity of the disease but are not as important as providing adequate fluids.

How can Cholera be prevented?

Cholera can be prevented by observing the following when traveling to areas where cholera has occurred:

- Only drink water that has been boiled or treated with chlorine or iodine. Safe beverages include tea and coffee made with boiled water and carbonated, bottled beverages with no ice
- Eat only foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot, or fruit that you have peeled yourself
- Avoid undercooked or raw fish or shellfish
- Make sure all vegetables are cooked
- Avoid salads.

Want more information?

Information about Cholera and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.

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