



# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## CHOLERA

### What is cholera?

Cholera is an acute intestinal infection caused by bacteria. The infection is usually mild or without symptoms at all, but in some cases it can be severe and even life-threatening.

### How is cholera spread?

Cholera can be spread through the following ways:

- water or food contaminated with the cholera bacteria
- raw or undercooked shellfish from salt water rivers, coastal waters, or the Gulf of Mexico
- inadequate treatment of drinking water and sewage
- contact with feces of an infected person

### What are possible symptoms?

The following are symptoms of cholera:

Early Stages:

- sudden onset of painless watery stools
- nausea
- vomiting
- abdominal cramps

Later:

- rapid dehydration

Some infected people have no symptoms at all.

### How is cholera diagnosed?

Cholera is usually diagnosed through a stool test. Oftentimes a second stool test

will be required to determine if the person is still infectious.

### What is the treatment for cholera?

Cholera requires no specific antibiotic treatment and usually resolves itself within 3-7 days. In severe cases antibiotics may be used to shorten the course and lessen the severity of the illness.

Persons with the infection need to drink plenty of liquids. It is very important to immediately replace the fluid and salts being lost. Patients can be treated with an oral rehydration solution, a prepackaged mixture of sugar and salts to be mixed with water and drunk in large amounts.

### How can cholera be prevented?

All travelers should observe the following recommendations:

- drink only water that has been boiled or treated with chlorine
- do not eat raw or under cooked foods
- hot foods should be eaten hot
- do not eat fruits that have been peeled
- avoid undercooked or raw fish or shellfish
- eat cooked vegetables, avoid salads
- avoid foods and beverages from street vendors
- do not transport perishable seafood back to the United States when traveling

A simple rule to remember:

**“Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it”**

The global presence of cholera changes, so travelers should seek updated information on countries of interest. These advisories can be found on the CDC and World Health Organization (WHO) websites as listed below.  
[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/)  
[www.who.int/csr/](http://www.who.int/csr/)