

Fact sheet

Cholera

What is cholera?

Cholera is a diarrheal illness caused by certain types of the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*. Cholera is often mild, but it can be severe and life threatening. About 10% of people diagnosed with cholera will need healthcare treatment

How is cholera spread?

Cholera is spread through contaminated water and food. It is very rare in the U.S., and people are usually infected while traveling abroad to places where cholera is common. The disease can spread rapidly in areas with inadequate treatment of sewage and drinking water.

The disease is not likely to spread directly from one person to another.

What are the signs and symptoms of cholera?

Signs and symptoms of cholera include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Severe dehydration and thirst
- Leg cramps

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually occur 2–3 days after a person ingests the bacteria that causes cholera. However, symptoms can start within a few hours or take up to 5 days to begin.

Who is most at risk?

Although cholera is extremely rare in the U.S., anyone can get cholera if they eat or drink contaminated food or water. Travelers visiting areas with active cholera transmission should take precautions to avoid food and water that may be contaminated.

How is cholera diagnosed?

The only way to diagnose cholera is to identify the bacteria in a stool or vomit sample.

How is cholera treated?

The main treatment for cholera is rehydration therapy to restore fluids and salts lost through severe diarrhea. Antibiotics may be prescribed for those who are severely ill, and zinc treatment in children may help improve symptoms.

How can cholera be prevented?

The risk of cholera in the U.S. is virtually nonexistent. The risk of cholera is very low for travelers, even those who visit areas with epidemic cholera, when simple precautions are observed.

Cholera vaccine may be recommended for travelers visiting areas of active cholera transmission. Check [here](#) for vaccine recommendations for your destination.

If traveling to an area with active cholera transmission:

- Drink bottled water, if possible. Otherwise, bring water to a rolling boil for one minute before drinking. Bottled carbonated water is safer than non-carbonated water. Other safe beverages include tea and coffee made with boiled water and carbonated, bottled beverages with no ice.
- Ask for drinks without ice unless the ice is made from bottled or boiled water. Avoid popsicles and flavored ices that may have been made with contaminated water.
- Eat only foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot, or fruit that you peeled yourself.
- Avoid undercooked or raw fish or shellfish, including ceviche.
- Make sure all vegetables are cooked; avoid salads.
- Avoid foods and beverages from street vendors.
- Do not bring perishable seafood back to the U.S.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Your [local health department](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](#)

A simple rule of thumb is: "Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it!"

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