



## Cholera

### What is cholera?

Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness of the intestine caused by the germ *Vibrio cholerae*. The infection is usually mild or without symptoms, but it can be severe.

### How does a person get cholera?

A person may get cholera by drinking water or eating food infected with the cholera germ. Also, shellfish eaten raw have been a source of the cholera germ.

### What are the symptoms of cholera?

People who are severely affected by the germ may throw up (vomit), get leg cramps and have large amounts of watery loose stools (diarrhea). People who experience the vomiting and watery loose stools must see a health care provider quickly because the rapid loss of body fluids can cause dehydration and shock.

### How soon will symptoms develop?

The onset of cholera is quick. Symptoms may start from one to five days after being infected with the germ.

### Is it spread from person to person?

No. Casual contact with an infected person is not a risk for becoming infected. Cholera can be spread by coming in contact with the stool of an infected person. This is usually what happens when there is a large increase in the number of people infected and sources of drinking water have been contaminated.

### Can cholera be treated?

Cholera is best treated by rehydration, which is immediate replacement of the body fluids and salts lost due to watery loose stools. Some fluid replacement can occur by the person drinking a prepackaged oral rehydration solution available from a medical provider. Severe cases may require intravenous fluid replacement. Antibiotics may be used to shorten the amount of time the person is sick, but are not as important as fluid replacement.

### Is there a vaccine to prevent cholera?

Not in the United States.

### What can be done to help prevent the spread of cholera?

- Always wash hands after using the bathroom.
- Always wash hands before cooking and handling foods.
- If traveling in areas where cholera is occurring, follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tips.

### Can cholera be used as a bioterrorist weapon?

Yes. Cholera can be used as a food safety threat because it can spread easily and quickly over a large area, can result in high sickness rates and requires a large amount of disease monitoring.

For more information on cholera, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or visit our website at [www.myguilford.com](http://www.myguilford.com) or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)