

What is cholera?

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Cholera

Cholera is an acute diarrhoeal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*.

How is cholera spread?

Cholera is spread through eating food or drinking water contaminated with faeces containing the cholera bacteria. Cholera is closely linked to inadequate environmental management.

Sudden large outbreaks are usually caused by a contaminated water supply. Raw or undercooked food may be a source of infection in areas where cholera is prevalent and sanitation is poor.

The absence or shortage of safe water and sufficient sanitation combined with a generally poor environmental status are the main causes of spread of the disease.

What are the risk factors?

The risk factors for cholera are related to poor sanitation and hygiene conditions. These include;

- Poor use of latrines.
- Inadequate clean water supply.
- Contamination of water due to poor storage.
- Raw vegetable and fruits taken from contaminated water or grown on ground level and irrigated with water containing human waste.
- Dirty homestead.

Incubation period

The short incubation period of two hours to five days, enhances the potentially explosive pattern of outbreaks.

Signs and symptoms of cholera:

A person suffering from cholera can develop the following:

- Passing of frequent watery rice like stool with no smell.
- Vomiting in some patients.
- Thirst.
- Body weakness.

Who is at risk of getting cholera?

Cholera should be suspected in outbreaks of waterborne diseases. Any patient aged 2 years or older is at risk.

How can cholera be prevented?

There is a vaccine available for cholera. However this should always be used as an additional public health tool and should not replace the usually recommended control measures such as improved water supplies, adequate sanitation and health education. The most effective ways to prevent cholera are by:

- Washing your hands with soap and clean water before handling food, after using a latrine and after handling children's faeces.
- Cooking food thoroughly and eating it while still hot.
- Boiling all drinking water or treating it with chlorine and storing it in a clean container (e.g jerrycan) with a cover.
- Disposing of all faeces, including children's, into the latrine
- Washing fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Maintaining a clean environment around homes.
- Always use long hand containers to always pour water from the storage container for drinking. Never dip the drinking cup into the storage container.

What is your role in preventing cholera?

Everyone has a role to play if cholera is to be prevented. Ensure that

- Your hands are always washed with soap and clean water before the handling food, after using latrine and handling children's faeces.
- Food is thoroughly cooked and eaten while still hot.
- All drinking water is boiled or treated with chlorine and stored in a clean container.
- You always pour water from the storage container for drinking. Never dip the drinking cup into the storage container.
- All faeces, including children's are disposed of in the latrine.
- Fruits and vegetables are thoroughly washed before eating them.
- Personal hygiene is observed and homes are kept clean.
- All sick people are taken to the nearest health unit immediately.

Points to remember:

- Cholera is a killer disease that can be prevented.
- Cholera is spread through eating food or drinking water contaminated with faeces.
- Even though cholera has a vaccine, prevention is the most effective way of avoiding the disease.
- Everyone is at risk of contracting cholera.
- There is treatment for cholera at the health centre/unit. It will save your life if you seek medical treatment on time.
- Self medication especially the use of local herbs worsens the condition of a patient with cholera. Seek proper medical help.
- Dispose of all faeces, including children's into the latrine.