

CHOLERA

Cholera is an acute diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* and is spread by ingestion of contaminated food or water. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but sometimes it can be severe and life threatening.

Symptoms

Approximately 5-10% of infected people will have severe cholera which in the early stages includes:

- Profuse watery diarrhea, sometimes described as "rice-water stools"
- Vomiting
- Rapid heart rate
- Loss of skin elasticity
- Dry mucous membranes
- Low blood pressure
- Thirst
- Muscle cramps
- Restlessness or irritability

People with severe cholera can develop acute renal failure, severe electrolyte imbalances and coma. If untreated, severe dehydration can rapidly lead to shock and death in hours.

Treatment

Infected people, when treated rapidly, can recover quickly and there are typically no long term consequences. People with cholera do not become carriers of the disease after they recover, but can be reinfected if exposed again.

With proper treatment, even severely ill patients can be saved:

Rehydration therapy, meaning prompt restoration of lost fluids and salts through rehydration therapy is the primary goal of treatment.

Antibiotic treatment, which reduces fluid requirements and duration of illness, is indicated for severe cases of cholera.

The best way to prevent cholera is by making people aware of it and ensuring that they have safe water, proper toilets and follow hygienic habits.