

# ALL ABOUT CHOLERA

## SIGNS, SYMPTOMS & TREATMENTS

Cholera is an infectious disease that can cause severe watery diarrhoea and vomiting. This is a serious disease, as it can spread easily and can be deadly if you don't get treatment as soon as possible. In fact, of the 2.9 million people who get cholera globally every year, around 95 000 pass away from their symptoms.



**Find out everything you need to know about cholera, including how it spreads and what to do if you're infected, below.**

### What is cholera?

Cholera is caused by a specific bacterium, *Vibrio cholerae*, which causes your body to lose lots of water and electrolytes. This results in excessive diarrhoea and, in some cases, vomiting. As your body is losing lots of liquids, you quickly become dehydrated, which can be fatal if not treated.

Because cholera comes from infected food and water supplies, the disease is common in areas with poor water quality and improper hygiene. The disease spreads through food and water that has been contaminated with human waste, rapidly spreading in unsanitary conditions.

### How do I know if I have cholera?

Symptoms usually begin to show between 12 hours and 5 days after infection. Usually, symptoms include sudden and frequent diarrhoea, along with nausea and vomiting. As the body loses liquids, it becomes dehydrated, which can lead to dry skin, extreme thirst, sunken eyes, low blood pressure and an electrolyte imbalance. These symptoms can lead to rapid heart rate, muscle cramps and shock, and if left untreated, could even result in death.

While some people may only experience mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, they are still infected and can spread the disease to others. Unfortunately, the methods for clinically diagnosing cholera take a long time and are quite expensive, so doctors usually diagnose patients based on their symptoms.

### How is cholera treated?

As the main source of danger comes from loss of liquids and electrolytes, cholera is treated by immediately giving the patient fluids and electrolytes to restore their fluid balance. This is usually done through oral rehydration solutions (such as Rehidrat sachets), but in more severe cases, the patient may need to go to the hospital and have their fluids replaced through an IV drip.

As the patient becomes more hydrated, symptoms will start to reduce. Antibiotics may be prescribed to shorten the length of the diarrhoea and remove the bacteria from the body.

If you suspect that you or someone you know has cholera, it is crucial to get medical attention as soon as possible. If there is a delay in seeking medical treatment, the infected person should be given oral rehydration solutions until they are able to see a medical professional.



## How can I minimise my risk of getting cholera?

While none of these measures provide 100% protection, there are a few ways to reduce your risk of becoming infected with cholera if you are in a high-risk area:

Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before handling food.



If you can't wash your hands with soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.



If you drink water from taps or boreholes, boil it before drinking or using it in cooking. Only use boiled or disinfected water for everything from drinking and cooking to brushing your teeth.



Only eat food that is properly cooked.



Only eat fruits or vegetables that have been properly washed in boiled water.



Avoid eating uncooked food where possible.

