

# Cholera

## What is cholera and what causes it?

Cholera is a severe intestinal disease caused by the bacteria, ***Vibrio cholerae*** (Vib-REE-O collar-ah). The bacteria is typically found in water environments such as freshwater lakes and rivers. Cholera is usually transmitted to people or animals through contaminated water sources. Contamination comes from fecal material from infected individuals.

Cholera can affect people and some animals and causes severe diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration, and shock. If untreated, death can occur within hours.

## What animals get cholera?

Most animals do not develop illness from cholera. Dogs may become infected if exposed to a very large number of the *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria in either food or water. Outbreaks have been reported in bison, cattle and dogs.

## How can my animal get cholera?

Animals can be exposed to the bacteria through ingestion (**oral**). This may occur from exposure to feces from infected animals or people or from fecally contaminated water, food or raw shellfish.

## How does cholera affect my animal?

Most animals infected will show no signs of illness. If illness occurs, animals will have large amounts of watery diarrhea and vomiting. They can become rapidly dehydrated, which can lead to death.

## Can I get cholera?

Yes. Human exposure to the cholera bacteria most commonly occurs from ingesting (**oral**) fecally contaminated water or eating undercooked or raw seafood, especially shellfish.

Cholera is generally a disease spread by poor sanitation, leading to contaminated water supplies. In the United States, cases of cholera are uncommon due to modern sewage plants and chlorine treatment of drinking water (which kills the cholera bacteria). Most cases occur when a person travels to a developing country or eats contaminated seafood.

When infection occurs in humans, signs develop quickly (as short as 5 hours) and include profuse, watery diarrhea and vomiting. The disease may be so severe that the individual loses all body fluids, becomes severely dehydrated and can die.

## Who should I contact, if I suspect cholera?

**In Animals** – Contact your veterinarian immediately.

**In Humans** – Contact your physician immediately.

## How can I protect my animal from cholera?

Do not allow your animal to be exposed to any other animal experiencing profuse, watery diarrhea. Make sure to provide your animal with food and water that you know is safe from contamination.

## How can I protect myself from cholera?

Avoid eating raw or undercooked fish or shellfish (e.g. crabs, oysters).

Cases of cholera are very rare in the U.S. Most cases occur following travel to foreign countries. If you or members of your family travel to a foreign country make sure you eat and drink only food and water you know are from safe (chlorinated) sources.

## For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets. Cholera at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/default.htm>

CDC website. Cholera at [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/cholera\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/cholera_g.htm)



**Cholera**  
is a rare but deadly  
diarrheal disease  
caused by the bacteria,  
***Vibrio cholerae***.

Photo from <http://remf.dartmouth.edu/images/>