

## **Diseases Fact Sheet - Cholera**

### **South Dakota Department of Health**

#### **Office of Disease Prevention Services - 605-773-3737 -(1-800-592-1861 in South Dakota only)**

This material is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical care. We are not able to answer personal medical questions. Please see your health care provider concerning appropriate care, treatment or other medical advice.

#### **What is it?**

Cholera is a bacterial disease that affects the intestinal tract. It is caused by a germ called *Vibrio cholerae*. Although cholera is a rare disease in the United States and other industrialized countries, global cases have increased steadily since 2005. The disease still occurs in SC Asia, Africa, and Haiti. Six worldwide outbreaks were documented between 1817 and 1911 that resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths. Currently, only a few cases are recognized in the United States each year.

#### **Who gets cholera?**

While cholera is a rare disease, those who may be at risk include people traveling to foreign countries where outbreaks are occurring, and people who consume raw or under cooked seafood from warm coastal waters subject to sewage contamination. In both instances, the risk is quite small.

#### **How is the germ spread?**

The cholera germ is passed in the stools. It is spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated by the fecal waste of an infected person. This occurs more often in underdeveloped countries lacking adequate water supplies and proper sewage disposal.

#### **What are the symptoms of cholera?**

People exposed to cholera may experience mild to severe watery diarrhea, vomiting and dehydration. Fever is usually absent.

#### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

The symptoms may appear from six hours to five days after exposure.

#### **What is the treatment for cholera?**



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Because of the rapid dehydration that may result from severe diarrhea, replacement of fluids by mouth or by the intravenous route is critical. Antibiotics may be used to shorten the duration of diarrhea and shedding of the germs in the feces.

### **Is there a vaccine for cholera?**

No cholera vaccine is available in the United States.

### **How can cholera be prevented?**

The single most important measure is to avoid consuming foods or water in foreign countries where cholera occurs unless they are known to be safe or have been properly treated.