

## What You Need to Know About Cholera and How to Respond

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**Cholera** is an acute diarrheal infection [caused by ingestion of food or water](#) contaminated with the bacterium [Vibrio cholerae](#). Cholera remains a global threat to public health and an indicator of inequity and lack of social development.

Cholera remains a persistent threat to public health in many regions around the world, particularly in Africa. [Despite significant advancements in healthcare, sanitation, and disease prevention](#), cholera outbreaks continue to occur, claiming lives and causing immense suffering. In this blog, we will explore the burden of cholera in the African region, examining its causes, impacts, and the efforts being made to combat this deadly

### Group at risk

Young children, pregnant women, older adults, people with malnutrition, HIV, or low stomach acid, and those living in or visiting places without clean water, proper toilets, or good hygiene are at higher risk of getting cholera.

### Symptoms of cholera

Cholera is a highly contagious illness transmitted through the consumption of contaminated food or water sources. Its effects can be severe, characterized by [intense, acute watery diarrhea](#). If left untreated, the severe manifestations of cholera can be fatal within a matter of hours. While many individuals infected with the [Vibrio cholerae bacteria](#) may not display any symptoms, they can still harbor [the bacteria in their feces for a period ranging from 1 to 10 days post-infection](#), potentially posing a risk of transmission to others. For those who do exhibit symptoms, [they typically range from mild to moderate in severity](#). Onset of symptoms generally occurs [within a window of 12 hours to 5 days after exposure](#). However, a small subset of patients may experience acute watery diarrhea accompanied by severe dehydration, which, if not promptly addressed, can result in fatality.

### What to do if you develop Cholera symptoms

**Begin Rehydration Immediately:** Use [Oral Rehydration Solution \(ORS\)](#), which is the main treatment. It is a powder that you mix with clean, boiled, or treated water to help replace the fluids and salts your body loses during diarrhea.



WHO advises treating cholera in two steps: first, give fluids quickly during the first 2 to 4 hours, then continue giving fluids until the diarrhea stops. For children aged 6 months to 5 years, it's also important to give zinc (20 mg each day for 10 days) to help them recover faster.

**Seek Medical Care without Delay:** It is very important to get medical help if you have severe diarrhea and vomiting, signs of dehydration like feeling weak, dark urine, or a fast heartbeat, if you are a young child, pregnant, or have a weak immune system, or if you recently traveled to or live in a place where there is a cholera outbreak.

**Antibiotic and supportive care:** In serious cases of cholera, [antibiotics like doxycycline or azithromycin can help you get better faster and reduce fluid loss](#), but they should always be used along with plenty of fluids, not as a replacement. You should not use medicines that stop diarrhea, because they can prolong the presence of bacteria in your body and slow down healing. It's also important to keep feeding young children, including breastfeeding babies, to help them stay strong and recover.

## Prevention of cholera

- **Be sure you drink and use safe water:** Ensure you drink and use safe water to [avoid ingesting contaminated sources](#) that may contain cholera bacteria.
- **Wash your hands often with soap and safe water:** Wash your hands frequently with soap and safe water to [minimize the risk of transmitting the bacteria](#) from surfaces to your mouth or food.
- **Use toilets:** Use toilets to prevent fecal contamination of the environment and water sources, [reducing the spread of cholera](#)
- **Boil it, cook it, peel it, or leave it:** When preparing food, follow safety measures such as boiling, cooking, peeling, or leaving it to [minimize the risk of consuming contaminated food](#).
- **Clean up safely:** Clean up safely to maintain hygienic conditions in your surroundings and [prevent the spread of cholera](#) bacteria through contaminated surfaces or objects.

## For more information

[World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

[The August 2017 WHO position paper on vaccines against cholera](#)

[Cholera prevention](#)

[Climate change and malaria, dengue, and cholera outbreaks in Africa: a call for concerted actions](#)

[Cholera in the African Region: weekly Regional cholera bulletin](#)

