

## FACTSHEET 12 – Cholera

August 2016

### **What Is Cholera?**

Cholera is a short term illness caused by certain types of the *Vibrio cholera* bacteria which produce a poison (toxin) in your small bowel. A large number of *Vibrio cholera* bacteria are required to produce enough toxins to cause symptoms in healthy people. These toxins cause a range of symptoms.

### **What Are The Symptoms?**

Symptoms include watery diarrhoea and fever. The onset of diarrhoea is usually quick and can lead to dehydration and shock. It is important that the patient seeks medical help.

### **How Is Cholera Diagnosed?**

Cholera is diagnosed by identifying the specific bacteria in the patient's stool samples.

### **How Could I Catch Cholera?**

People usually catch Cholera whilst travelling abroad, from contaminated water or food washed in contaminated water. It can also be caught by eating contaminated undercooked seafood. It is difficult to catch Cholera directly from another person, especially in countries such as the UK. However, it is important to take care to reduce the risk of passing the bacteria to other people.

### **When I Travel, How Can I Reduce The Risk Of Catching Cholera?**

There are a number of precautions you can take to help reduce your risk of getting Cholera if you're travelling in an affected area:

- Only drink water that you have boiled or treated with chlorine or iodine. Other safe drinks include tea and coffee made with boiled water and carbonated, bottled beverages with no ice.
- Only eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot, or fruit that you have peeled yourself.
- Avoid undercooked or raw fish or shellfish. Make sure all vegetables are cooked. Avoid salads.

### **How Can We Stop The Spread Of Cholera?**

If you have suspected Cholera, the following steps should be taken to stop the spread of the infection:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap in running water and dry them completely. In general, liquid soap and warm water are better.
- Always wash your hands after going to the toilet and before preparing or serving food, or eating meals.
- Make sure you clean the toilet and any soiled areas often and thoroughly.
- You may need to stay off work – more information is provided over the page.

### **The Doctor Suspects I Have Cholera, Should I Go To Work?**

- If you have suspected or confirmed Cholera, you should stay off work until 48 hours after your first normal stool (once your diarrhoea has stopped).
- If your job involves cooking, preparing or serving food, you will need to stay off work for a longer period of time to make sure the bacteria do not spread to others. You should not return to work until you have had two stool samples taken 24 hours apart, which show that you no longer have the bacteria in your stools.
- If in the meantime, the doctor confirms that you do not have Cholera, you may return to work as usual – as long as you have not had diarrhoea for 48 hours.

### **My Friend/Family Member Who I Live/Have Travelled With Has Suspected Cholera, What Should I Do?**

- If you live with, or have travelled with someone who has suspected or confirmed Cholera and you work with food (cooking, preparing or servicing food), you will need a stool sample to see if the bacteria are present. You should stay off work until you get the test result back and it is negative.
- If you live with or have travelled with someone who has suspected or confirmed Cholera and you do not work with food, you can carry on working as usual so long as you are well.

You should also seek medical help if you get any Cholera symptoms within 5 days of your last contact with a symptomatic case.