

Cholera

- Cholera is an acute diarrheal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae* originating from human feces. The short incubation period of two hours to five days enhances the potentially explosive pattern of outbreaks.
- Cholera is an extremely virulent disease. It affects both children and adults and can kill within hours.
- About 75% of people infected with *V. cholerae* do not develop any symptoms, although the bacteria are present in their feces for 7–14 days after infection and are shed back into the environment, potentially infecting other people. It is generally not spread from person to person, only from food/water sources.
- Among people who develop symptoms, 80% have mild or moderate symptoms, while around 20% develop acute watery diarrhea with severe dehydration. This can lead to death if untreated.
- The consequences of a disaster – such as disruption of water and sanitation systems, or the displacement of populations to inadequate and overcrowded camps – can increase the risk of cholera transmission should the bacteria be present or introduced. Epidemics have never arisen from dead bodies.

Dysentery

An inflammation of the intestine, especially of the colon, that may be caused by chemical irritants, bacteria, protozoa, or parasites. It is characterized by frequent and bloody stools and severe abdominal pain. Dysentery can be spread from person to person.

Diarrheal disease

- Diarrheal disease is the second leading cause of death in children under five years old, and is responsible for killing 1.5 million children every year.
- Diarrhea can last several days, and can leave the body without the water and salts that are necessary for survival. Most people who die from diarrhea actually die from severe dehydration and fluid loss.
- Diarrhea is a symptom of infections caused by a host of bacterial, viral and parasitic organisms, most of which are spread by feces-contaminated water. Infection is more common when there is a shortage of clean water for drinking, cooking and cleaning.
- Infection is spread through contaminated food or drinking-water, or from person-to-person as a result of poor hygiene. Water contaminated with human feces, for example, from sewage, septic tanks and latrines, is of particular concern. Animal feces also contain microorganisms that can cause diarrhea.
- Diarrheal disease is treatable with a solution of clean water, sugar and salt, and with zinc tablets.
- There are three clinical types of diarrhea:
 - acute watery diarrhea – lasts several hours or days, and includes cholera;
 - acute bloody diarrhea – also called dysentery; and
 - persistent diarrhea – lasts 14 days or longer.
- The most severe threat posed by diarrhea is dehydration. During a diarrheal episode, water and electrolytes (sodium, chloride, potassium and bicarbonate) are lost through liquid stools, vomit, sweat, urine and breathing. Dehydration occurs when these losses are not replaced.
- The degree of dehydration is rated on a scale of three.
 - 1 - Early dehydration – no signs or symptoms.
 - 2 - Moderate dehydration: thirst, restless or irritable behavior, decreased skin elasticity, sunken eye
 - 3 - Severe dehydration: shock, diminished consciousness, lack of urine output, cool, moist extremities, a rapid and feeble pulse, low or undetectable blood pressure, and pale skin.Death can follow severe dehydration if body fluids and electrolytes are not replenished, either

through the use of an oral rehydration solution, or through an intravenous drip.