Cholera

Cholera is a severe bacterial illness that is spread by contaminated water. The illness may have symptoms such as lots of watery diarrhea, vomiting, and leg cramps. The danger is dehydration from rapid loss of body fluids and shock. Fluids may be lost at a rate of one quart every hour. Without treatment, death may occur within hours.

In an epidemic, the source of the contamination is often food and water. The disease can spread rapidly in areas without adequate treatment of sewage and drinking water. The disease is not likely to spread directly from one person to another. Casual contact with an infected person is not a risk.

When simple precautions are observed, contracting the disease is unlikely.

SYMPTOMS

This disease may be mild or without symptoms, but may be severe. Watery diarrhea, vomiting, and rapid loss of body fluids may lead to dehydration and shock.

DIAGNOSIS

Laboratory tests may isolate and identify specific germs in the feces and blood. These tests help indicate the correct treatment to be used.

PREVENTION

- Drink only water that you have boiled or treated with chlorine or iodine. Other safe beverages include tea and coffee made with boiled water and carbonated, bottled beverages with no ice (which could be contaminated).
- Eat only 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, and avoid salads.
- Avoid foods and beverages from street vendors.
- **A simple rule of thumb is "Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it."**
- No cholera vaccination requirements exist for entry or exit in any country.

TREATMENT

- Cholera may treated by replacing the fluid and salts lost. A mixture of sugar and salts is used throughout the world to treat diarrhea. Severe cases may require intravenous fluids.
- Antibiotics shorten the course of cholera, but they are not as important as rehydration. Persons who develop severe diarrhea and vomiting in countries where cholera occurs should seek medical attention promptly.

TRAVELERS' INFORMATION ON CHOLERA

Available at http://www.cdc.gov/travel.

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