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Cholera

Cholera is an acute intestinal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. It has a short incubation period and produces an enterotoxin that causes a copious, painless, watery diarrhoea that can quickly lead to severe dehydration and death if treatment is not promptly given. Vomiting also occurs in most patients.

Most persons infected with *V. cholerae* do not become ill, although the bacterium is present in their faeces for 7-14 days. When illness does occur, about 80-90% of episodes are of mild or moderate severity and are difficult to distinguish clinically from other types of acute diarrhoea. Less than 20% of ill persons develop typical cholera with signs of moderate or severe dehydration.

Cholera remains a global threat and is one of the key indicators of social development. While the disease no longer poses a threat to countries with minimum standards of hygiene, it remains a challenge to countries where access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation cannot be guaranteed. Almost every developing country faces cholera outbreaks or the threat of a cholera epidemic.

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