



Epidemiological Unit

Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition

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Cholera Fact Sheet

Introduction

Cholera is caused by the bacteria *Vibrio cholerae*. Last cholera case in Sri Lanka was reported to the epidemiology unit in 2003.

Clinical Features

Cholera symptoms include watery faeces with bits of mucus and mild fishy smell, vomiting, abdominal cramps and dehydration. Fever is rare, usually found only in children.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is confirmed by the isolation of *V. cholerae* serogroup O1 or O139 from faeces. A presumptive diagnosis can be made by visualisation by dark field or phase microscopy of *V. cholerae*'s characteristic motility, specifically inhibited by preservative-free serotype-specific antiserum.

Treatments

Treatment of cholera consists mainly in replacement of lost fluids and salts. The use of oral rehydration salts (ORS) is the quickest and most efficient way of doing this. Most people recover in three to six days. If the infected person becomes severely dehydrated, intravenous fluids can be given. Patient may be treated with antibiotics, such as tetracycline and erythromycin.

Reservoir

V. cholerae is often part of the normal flora of brackish water and estuaries, and can be associated with algal blooms (plankton). Humans are one of the reservoirs of the pathogenic form of *V. cholerae*.

Communicability

Persons are infectious during the acute stage and for a few days after recovery. By the end of the first week 70% of patients are non-infectious. By the end of the third week 98% are non-infectious. Occasionally the carrier state may persist for months and chronic biliary infection with intermittent shedding of organisms may last for years.

Mode of transmission

Transmission occurs through ingestion of contaminated water and food. Sudden large outbreaks are usually caused by a contaminated water supply. Raw or undercooked seafood may be a source of infection in areas where cholera is prevalent and sanitation is poor. Transmission due to direct person to person contact is rare.

Incubation period

Incubation period can be anything between a few hours and five days. Most people get symptoms after two to five days.

Preventive measures

- Only drink boiled cool water .
- Eat freshly prepared food, cooked thoroughly and hot - in particular, don't eat raw or undercooked seafood.
- Don't eat raw vegetables such as green salads as they may have been washed in contaminated water - only eat raw vegetables and fruit that you can peel.
- Wash hands with soap and water after going to the toilet and particularly before handling food.