General Information:

**Cholera** is an acute bacterial intestinal infection acquired primarily by ingesting contaminated water or food. The severity of the disease can range from mild illness to death in untreated cases. The incubation period can range from a few hours to five days. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) states that travelers who stay in urban areas and use standard accommodations in countries reporting Cholera are at minimal risk of infection. The infection is often mild and self-limiting in healthy tourists who follow prudent dietary habits. World Health Organization and CDC have reported that cholera vaccine is no longer officially a requirement for travel to foreign countries. However, local authorities in some developing countries may still "unofficially" require a cholera vaccination for travelers. The risk of cholera to U.S. travelers is so low that vaccination is of questionable benefit. It is not recommended because of the brief and incomplete immunity it offers. **Cholera vaccine has not been available in the United States since June 2000.**

Prevention:

Travelers to cholera-infected areas should avoid eating high-risk foods, especially fish and shellfish. Food that is cooked and served hot, fruits and vegetables peeled by the traveler personally, beverages made from boiled or chemically disinfected water, or carbonated drinks are usually safe for consumption. Cholera bacteria is readily killed by stomach acid; however, if a traveler ingests a large dose of bacteria, or if traveler is taking antacid or anti-ulcer drugs, bacteria can get past the intestinal wall and may lead to an increased risk of diseases. Seventy-five percent of infections are mild.

Signs & Symptoms:

Symptoms of cholera include a sudden onset of profuse, painless, watery stools; vomiting; muscle cramps; and rapid dehydration. The absence of blood or pus in the stools and a lack of fever are distinguishing features of cholera. Stools are colorless with small flecks of mucus, often described as “rice water”. **If the traveler becomes dizzy, light-headed, or faint, with vomiting and diarrhea, please seek medical attention immediately.**

Treatment:

Cholera kills by dehydration. If the traveler develops severe diarrhea, start re-hydration treatment immediately—sometimes hospitalization and IV fluids are needed. Antibiotics will shorten the duration of illness and are an important adjunct to fluid therapy. With fluid replacement, most cases of cholera last 3-5 days.

Questions or side effect reporting: Call Olin Health Center, Travel Clinic at 353-3161, or you may visit the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) website at: [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel), or the Olin Travel Clinic website at: [www.msu.edu/~travel](http://www.msu.edu/~travel).

Sources:  
- [Travel Health Guide](http://www.msu.edu/~travel) by Stuart R. Rose, MD, 2001  
- [CDC Health Information for International Travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel), 2001-2002  
- [The Red Book](http://www.msu.edu/~travel), 2000  
- [Wilderness Medicine](http://www.msu.edu/~travel) by Paul S. Auerbach, 2001