

# Cholera in the United States

*[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Reginald Tucker] Hi. I'm Reginald Tucker and today I'm talking with Anna Newton, a Surveillance Epidemiologist at CDC. Our conversation is based on her paper about cholera in the United States which appears in CDC's journal, Emerging Infectious Diseases. Welcome, Anna.

[Anna Newton] Hello.

[Reginald Tucker] Tell us about your study.

[Anna Newton] In our study, we summarize the United States' cases of cholera that occurred between October 2010 and April 2011 that were associated with the cholera epidemic in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, a region which is also known as Hispaniola. Because of the epidemic, enhanced monitoring and notification for cholera occurred in the United States.

[Reginald Tucker] Why did you do this study?

[Anna Newton] Well, cholera is a major cause of diarrhea throughout the developing world. In the United States, however, cholera is really rare. Since 2000, between one and eight cases of cholera were diagnosed each year among people returning or coming from cholera-affected countries. We know that when cholera breaks out in an area, people who travel there from the United States can get infected. Back in the 1990s, over 100 people in the US became ill with cholera after traveling to Latin America during a cholera outbreak there.

[Reginald Tucker] What were your findings?

[Anna Newton] There were 23 cases of cholera in the United States from October 2010 until April 2011. Thirteen patients reported travel to Haiti and nine to the Dominican Republic. The main reason for travel was to visit friends and family. One patient reported eating conch, which is a type of shellfish, which had been brought back by a family member from Haiti.

[Reginald Tucker] What importance do these findings have for people who live in the United States?

[Anna Newton] The United States Department of State has issued a travel warning advising US citizens against all non-essential travel to Haiti. People traveling to areas where cholera is occurring may be exposed to the cholera bacteria and should take appropriate prevention measures while abroad so they don't get diarrhea. People with severe diarrhea who have just come back from traveling to an area with cholera should be sure to tell their doctor they have been in a country where they could have gotten cholera.

[Reginald Tucker] How can people protect themselves from getting cholera when traveling?

[Anna Newton] Cholera is transmitted through contaminated food and water. The number one prevention measure for travelers is to drink safe water. Safe water is water that has been boiled,

carbonated, or disinfected. This includes only using ice that is made from safe water. Remember to wash your hands often with soap and safe water, and when considering what food to eat, a good rule of thumb is, “boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it.” This means that people should cook food well, keep it covered, and eat it hot. When preparing food, wash (using safe water) and peel fruits and vegetables. Avoid eating fresh salads or raw seafood. Don’t bring back food in luggage, especially seafood. These same measures will also help to protect travelers from getting other types of diarrhea.

[Reginald Tucker] Thanks, Anna. I’ve been talking with Anna Newton about her paper, *Cholera in United States Associated with Epidemic in Hispaniola*, which appears in the November 2011 issue of CDC’s journal, Emerging Infectious Diseases. You can see the entire article online at [www.cdc.gov/eid](http://www.cdc.gov/eid).

If you’d like to comment on this podcast, send an email to [eideditor@cdc.gov](mailto:eideditor@cdc.gov). That’s e-i-d-editor - one word - at c-d-c-dot-gov. I’m Reginald Tucker, for Emerging Infectious Diseases.

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