

## **Cholera Tidbits:**

Cholera is a sickness caused by a bacillus (rod-shaped bacteria) called *vibrio cholera*. The *vibrio cholera* is so small you cannot see it with your eyes. You need a microscope to find it.

You get cholera by ingesting water, food or anything else that has been contaminated by the feces (poop) of a cholera victim. Symptoms include extreme diarrhea, very sharp muscle cramps, vomiting, and fever. Cholera is a scary sickness because its victims can die within 12-48 hours, mostly from dehydration (not having enough water in your body.) Most victims who are not dead 24 hours after their first fever are sick another five to seven days before getting better.

In 1817, there was a very large cholera epidemic (very large outbreak of sickness) which ran from India throughout Russia and into Europe. By 1827 cholera was the most feared disease in Europe. People did not know what caused cholera. After a second large cholera epidemic in England (1854), the British made links between cholera and unsanitary conditions, but the real cause of cholera was still unknown. Immigrants on the westward trails had no idea of the cause either. It wasn't until a German doctor discovered *vibrio cholera* in the feces of a cholera victim in 1875 that people understood the cause of the disease.

Today we know that sanitation and public health share a very important link. However, immigrants on the westward trails were unaware of how important hand-washing and proper toilets were to staying healthy. For a while cholera was almost eradicated (wiped out of existence) in our world. Today, however, it is on the rise in many poorer countries.

How would you treat an infectious disease if you didn't know what caused it or how it spread?