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### **Cholera Guidance Talking Points**

- An ongoing epidemic of cholera in Haiti may result in introduction of cholera cases to Florida. Since the epidemic began in October, there have been several thousand cholera cases and several hundred deaths in Haiti.
- Florida has approximately 241,000 Haitian-born residents, representing 46% of the Haitian-born population residing in the United States. Travel to and from Haiti has increased since the Haitian earthquake; this includes Florida residents visiting family in Haiti and relief workers. We can expect that some travelers returning from Haiti will become ill with cholera after arrival in Florida.
- Cholera is an acute diarrheal disease caused by infection of the intestine with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but illness sometimes can be severe. In severe cases, the infected person may experience profuse watery diarrhea and vomiting which can cause rapid loss of body fluids and lead to dehydration and shock. Without treatment, death can occur within hours.
- A person can get cholera by drinking water or eating food contaminated with the cholera bacterium. The potential for spread in the United States is extremely low, because U.S. water, sanitation, and food systems minimize the risk for fecal contamination of food and water. Person-to-person transmission is rare. During the Latin American epidemic in the early 1990s, about 20 cases of cholera in travelers occurred in Florida with no local spread.
- Despite the low potential for cholera spreading within the U.S, the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) wants to ensure that high-risk situations, such as cholera in a food-handler or clusters of illness are identified and those affected are provided medical treatment. Suspected cases of cholera should be reported immediately to County Health Departments by doctors, hospitals and laboratories, without waiting for laboratory confirmation.
- Travelers who develop severe, watery diarrhea, or diarrhea and vomiting, within 5 days after return from Haiti should seek medical attention immediately.
- Most hospital and private laboratories can identify cholera, but health care providers should request that stool specimens from suspected cases be cultured for the isolation of cholera.
- Family members and caretakers of ill travelers returning from Haiti should wash their hands frequently as they may be at risk of contracting cholera if handling the traveler's vomit or feces.

FDOH advisories and guidance and additional information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are available at [http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease\\_ctrl/epi/Acute/cholera.htm](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/epi/Acute/cholera.htm).