

FAQ: Cholera in Southern Africa

Q: I've heard about cholera cases in Southern Africa. Should I be concerned about travellers visiting the region?

A: Some countries in Southern Africa are currently experiencing a cholera outbreak that has affected several countries, however the risk of a tourist contracting cholera is very low with proper precautions. Efforts are also underway to control and mitigate its spread effectively.

Q: Where exactly is this outbreak occurring?

A: The current outbreak has impacted several countries in Southern Africa. It's essential to stay updated on the situation, as affected areas can change. Here are reliable sources for current information:

- World Health Organization (WHO) - Africa Region: <https://www.afro.who.int/> (search for "cholera")
- ReliefWeb: <https://reliefweb.int/> (search for "cholera Southern Africa")
- National Institute of Communicable Diseases (South Africa): <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/cholera/>

Q: What is the situation in South Africa?

A: South Africa experienced isolated cholera outbreaks in 2023, primarily in the Free State, Limpopo, and Gauteng provinces. These outbreaks were not considered a national emergency. Very few cholera cases have been reported in South Africa (less than a dozen), with the majority being imported cases related to travel to and from endemic countries with outbreaks. Generally, South Africa maintains high water quality standards. The government's long-term focus remains on ensuring water quality and sanitation are upheld across all municipalities.

Q: How is cholera transmitted, and how can tourists protect themselves?

A: Cholera is a bacterial disease which spreads through contaminated water or food, primarily in areas with poor sanitation. It's essential for travellers to practice good hygiene, such as washing hands regularly and consuming only well-prepared food and safe drinking water, which tourists typically have access to.

Q: What are the symptoms of cholera?

A: Most people infected with cholera experience no symptoms or only mild ones. However, a small percentage develop severe symptoms including:

- Profuse watery diarrhoea
- Vomiting

- Rapid dehydration (sunken eyes, dry skin, decreased urine output)

Q: Is it safe for tourists to visit Southern Africa during the outbreak?

A: Yes, with the appropriate precautions, it is safe for tourists to visit. The risk of contracting cholera for tourists adhering to recommended guidelines is very low, especially when visiting areas that maintain high standards of hygiene and sanitation, commonly found in tourist accommodations and venues.

Q: How can tourists protect themselves?

A: Here's how tourists can stay safe:

- **Be aware:** Stay informed about outbreak hotspots and avoid those areas if possible. Understand that cholera is limited to certain areas of Southern Africa.
- **Safe water:** Drink only bottled, boiled, or chemically treated water. Avoid ice unless made from safe water.
- **Food safety:** Eat well-cooked foods served hot. Choose fruit and vegetables you can peel yourself. Avoid street food vendors.
- **Hand hygiene:** Wash hands frequently with soap and safe water, especially before eating and after using the bathroom. Carry hand sanitiser.
- **Vaccination:** Check if the cholera vaccine is available in your country and consider getting vaccinated.

Q: What if a traveller suspects they may have cholera?

A: Encourage them to seek medical attention immediately, even for mild symptoms. Early treatment significantly improves outcomes.

Q: What resources are available for travellers in case of a medical emergency?

A: Advise them to get comprehensive travel insurance including medical evacuation and to keep emergency contact numbers for their embassy and nearest medical facilities.

Q: What are local authorities doing to contain the outbreak?

A: Governments in affected countries and international health organisations like the WHO are actively working to contain the cholera outbreak. Efforts include:

- **Awareness campaigns:** Promoting safe hygiene practices and educating the public about cholera prevention.
- **Rapid response teams:** Providing treatment, setting up field hospitals, and training healthcare workers.

- **WASH improvements:** Increasing access to clean water and sanitation facilities throughout the region.