

LONDON  
SCHOOL of  
HYGIENE  
& TROPICAL  
MEDICINE



Kousoulis, AA (2012) Etymology of cholera. *Emerging infectious diseases*, 18 (3). p. 540. ISSN 1080-6040

Downloaded from: <http://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/2006417/>

#### Usage Guidelines

Please refer to usage guidelines at <http://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact [researchonline@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:researchonline@lshtm.ac.uk).

Available under license: Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

## References

1. Gray KJ, Kafulafula G, Matemba M, Kamdolozi M, Membe G, French N, et al. Streptococcus and HIV infection in pregnant women, Malawi, 2008–2010. *Emerg Infect Dis*. 2011;17:1932–5.
2. Epalza C, Goetghebuer T, Hainaut M, Prayez F, Barlow P, Dediste A, et al. High incidence of invasive group B streptococcal infections in HIV-exposed uninfected infants. *Pediatrics*. 2010;126:e631–8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2010-0183>
3. Mussi-Pinhata MM, Freimanis L, Yamamoto AY, Korelitz J, Pinto JA, Cruz ML, et al. Infectious disease morbidity among young HIV-1–exposed but uninfected infants in Latin American and Caribbean countries: the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development International Site Development Initiative Perinatal Study. *Pediatrics*. 2007;119:e694–704. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-1856>
4. Koyanagi A, Humphrey JH, Ntozini R, Nathoo K, Moulton LH, Iliff P, et al. Morbidity among human immunodeficiency virus–exposed but uninfected, human immunodeficiency virus–infected, and human immunodeficiency virus–unexposed infants in Zimbabwe before availability of highly active antiretroviral therapy. *Pediatr Infect Dis J*. 2011;30:45–51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/INF.0b013e3181ecbf7e>
5. Filteau S. The HIV-exposed, uninfected African child. *Trop Med Int Health*. 2009;14:276–87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-3156.2009.02220.x>

Address for correspondence: Tessa Goetghebuer, Hôpital Saint-Pierre—Department of Pediatrics, 322 Rue Haute, Brussels 1000, Belgium; email: [tessa\\_goetghebuer@stpierre-bru.be](mailto:tessa_goetghebuer@stpierre-bru.be)

## Etymology of Cholera

**To the Editor:** I read with great interest the article by Männikkö (1) on the etymology of cholera. However, discovering the origin of the word with certainty is an intricate matter. The word cholera is undoubtedly Greek because Hippocrates was the first to mention it in his writings, although the exact disease he was referring to is unknown (2,3).

Apart from the rather probable derivation from *cholē* (the word for bile and a dominant term in the humoral theory, which is of Hippocratic and not Galenic [1] provenance), one more hypothesis has been suggested. The word *cholera*, sometimes *cholēdra*, originally meant a gutter (4). Following this connection, cholera came to mean a pestiferous disease during which fluids are forcefully expelled from the body, resembling a gutter (4). This etymology-derived definition could suggest that Hippocrates and Galen, the prolific medical writers of antiquity who each in his time referred to cholera, may have witnessed cases of this infectious disease, albeit not in the epidemic form it took in ancient India (5).

In addition, a missing clue on this issue is that cholera might derive

from *cholās*, an Attic word meaning intestine, which has not survived in modern Greek (4). This new connection with the gastrointestinal tract further suggests possible knowledge of cholera in its present form, mainly diarrhea and vomiting. Hippocrates made such a reference, although loosely (2). Reaching a conclusion on the etymology of cholera remains intriguing.

### Antonis A. Kousoulis

Author affiliation: University of Athens, Athens, Greece; and Society of Junior Doctors, Athens

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid1803.111636>

## References

1. Männikkö N. Etymologia: cholera. *Emerg Infect Dis*. 2011;17:2104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3201/eid1711.et1711>
2. Hippocrates. *Collected works [in Greek]*. Athens (Greece): Kaktos Publications; 1992.
3. Howard-Jones N. Cholera nomenclature and nosology: a historical note. *Bull World Health Organ*. 1974;51:317–24.
4. Stamatakos I. *Dictionary of the ancient Greek language [in Greek]*. Athens (Greece): Phoenix; 1972.
5. MacNamara NC. *A history of Asiatic cholera*. London: P. MacMillan; 1876.

Address for correspondence: Antonis A. Kousoulis, 131 Lambrou Katsoni St, Moschato, Athens 18344, Greece; email: [antonis.kousoulis@sni.gr](mailto:antonis.kousoulis@sni.gr)

## The Public Health Image Library (PHIL)



The Public Health Image Library (PHIL), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, contains thousands of public health-related images, including high-resolution (print quality) photographs, illustrations, and videos.

PHIL collections illustrate current events and articles, supply visual content for health promotion brochures, document the effects of disease, and enhance instructional media.

PHIL Images, accessible to PC and Macintosh users, are in the public domain and available without charge.

Visit PHIL at <http://phil.cdc.gov/phil>.