



Amebiasis Facts

What is it?

Amebiasis is a disease caused by a one-celled parasite called *Entamoeba histolytica*.

Who is at risk for amebiasis?

Although anyone can have this disease, it is most common in people who live in developing countries that have poor sanitary conditions. It is also found in people who have travelled to developing countries and in people who live in institutions that have poor sanitary conditions. Men who have sex with men can become infected and can get sick from the infection, but they often do not have symptoms.

How is amebiasis spread?

- By putting anything into the mouth that has touched the stool of a person who is infected with the parasite.
- By swallowing something, such as water or food, that is contaminated with the parasite.
- By touching and bringing to the mouth parasites and cysts (eggs) of parasites picked up from surfaces that are contaminated with the parasite.

What are the symptoms of amebiasis?

On average about one in 10 people who are infected with the parasite becomes sick from the infection. The symptoms often are quite mild and can include loose stools, stomach pain and stomach cramping. Amebic dysentery is a severe form of amebiasis associated with stomach pain, bloody stools and fever.

Rarely, the parasite invades the liver and forms an abscess.

The time between becoming infected and becoming sick is commonly two to four weeks after swallowing the parasite, but may be more quickly or more slowly.

How is infection prevented?

If travelling to a country that has poor sanitary conditions:

- Drink only bottled or boiled (for one minute) water or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Do **not** drink fountain drinks or any drinks with ice cubes. Another way to make water safe is by filtering it through an "absolute one micron or less" filter **and** dissolving iodine tablets in the filtered water. "Absolute one micron" filters can be found in camping/outdoor supply stores.
- Do **not** eat fresh fruit or vegetables that you did not peel yourself.
- Do **not** eat or drink milk, cheese or dairy products that may not have been pasteurized.
- Do **not** eat or drink anything sold by street vendors.

This parasite can be spread from the infected person to others. However, the risk of spreading infection is low if the infected person is treated with antibiotics and practices good personal hygiene. This includes thorough hand washing with soap and water after using the toilet, after changing diapers, and before handling food.

For further information, please contact your local health unit.



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