



AMEBIASIS

What is Amebiasis?

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

Who gets Amebiasis?

Although anyone can have this disease, it is more common in people who live in tropical areas with poor sanitary conditions. In the United States, Amebiasis is most common in:

- People who have traveled to tropical places that have poor sanitary conditions
- Immigrants from tropical countries that have poor sanitary conditions
- People who live in institutions that have poor sanitary conditions
- Men who have sex with men.

How is Amebiasis spread?

E. histolytica infection can occur when a person:

- Puts anything into their mouth that has touched the feces (stools) of a person who is infected with *E. histolytica*
- Swallows something, such as water or food, that is contaminated with *E. histolytica*
- Swallows *E. histolytica* cysts (eggs) picked up from contaminated surfaces or fingers.

What are the symptoms of Amebiasis?

Symptoms are often quite mild and can include diarrhea (loose feces), stomach pain, and stomach cramping. Amoebic dysentery is a severe form of Amebiasis associated with stomach pain, bloody stools, and fever. Rarely, *E. histolytica* invades the liver and forms an abscess (a collection of pus). In a small number of instances, it has been shown to spread to other parts of the body, such as the lungs or brain, but this is very uncommon.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Only about 10% to 20% of people who are infected with *E. histolytica* become sick from the infection. Those people who do become sick usually develop symptoms within two to four weeks, though it can sometimes take longer.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Yes, but the risk of spreading infection is low if the infected person is treated with antibiotics and practices good personal hygiene. This includes thorough handwashing with soap and water after using the toilet, after changing diapers, and before handling or preparing food.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the treatment for Amebiasis?

Several antibiotics are available to treat Amebiasis. Treatment must be prescribed by a physician. Only one antibiotic will be prescribed if the *E. histolytica* infection has not caused illness. Otherwise, two antibiotics (first one and then the other) will probably be prescribed.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of Amebiasis?

People come in contact with *E. histolytica* most often while traveling in developing countries. To avoid getting amebiasis while traveling:

- Do not eat or drink anything sold by street vendors.
- Do not drink fountain drinks or use ice cubes.
- Drink bottled water that is sealed; or if drinking tap water, make sure it was boiled for at least one minute, treated with iodine tablets, or filtered through an “absolute one micron or less” filter.
- Drink carbonated drinks in bottles or cans.
- Eat only fresh fruits or vegetables that you peel yourself.
- Eat or drink only pasteurized dairy products.
- Eat only food that has been cooked thoroughly and is served steaming hot.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before handling food and after using the toilet.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/amebiasis/general-info.html>