

# AMEBIASIS (AMEBIC DYSENTERY)

## What is amebiasis?

Amebiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a tiny parasite (amoeba) called *Entamoeba histolytica*. Anyone can get amebiasis, but it occurs more often in the following groups:

- People travelling from regions with poor sanitary conditions
- Individuals in institutions for the developmentally disabled
- Individuals who engage in sexual practices that may permit fecal-oral transmission

## What are the symptoms of amebiasis?

Most people do not become sick, although 10% to 20% of people can develop symptoms. Symptoms can take a few days to several months or years to appear but commonly take two to four weeks after exposure.

Symptoms can include:

- Diarrhea
- Bloody dysenteric stool
- Lower abdominal pain
- Tenesmus (urge to pass stool)
- Weight loss
- Fever
- Rarely causes liver abscess

## How does amebiasis spread?

A person can become infected with amebiasis by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by feces that contain the amoeba cysts. Cysts can survive in moist conditions for weeks to months. Sexual transmission may also occur through fecal-oral contact.

Some people with amebiasis may carry the parasite for weeks to years, often without symptoms, but can still spread the infection.

Humans are the only host for this parasite. Animals do not become infected with or carry the parasite, although in some parts of the world, flies may transfer amoeba cysts from human stool to fruits and vegetables.

## How is amebiasis treated?

Treatment is recommended for amebiasis and must be prescribed by a physician. In consultation with a health care provider, treatment may also be available for individuals without symptoms.

## How can amebiasis be prevented?

- Practice thorough handwashing. Wash hands carefully with soap and water before preparing or eating food, after changing diapers and after using the toilet
- Sanitary disposal of sewage
- Avoid sexual practices that may permit fecal-oral transmission, until effectively treated with antibiotics

### PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675

TTY 1-866-512-6228

york.ca

- If ill with diarrhea, avoid preparing or handling food
- If travelling to a country that has poor sanitary conditions:
  - Drink water from a safe supply. If you are unsure of the supply, drink bottled water or boil water to a rolling boil for one minute. Remember that ice cubes made from contaminated water may also carry the parasite
  - Avoid eating raw shellfish harvested from unknown sources
  - Wash all fruits and vegetables with bottled water or peel before eating