

Amebiasis

What is Amebiasis?

Amebiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite, called *Entamoeba histolytica* (ent-a-ME-ba his-to-LI-ti-ka). Amebiasis occurs worldwide. Although, anyone can acquire this illness, it is most common in people who live in developing countries that have poor sanitary conditions. It is also found in people who have traveled to developing countries and in people who live in institutions with poor sanitation.

What are the symptoms of Amebiasis?

People exposed to this parasite may experience mild or severe symptoms or no symptoms at all. The mild form of amebiasis includes nausea, diarrhea, weight loss, abdominal tenderness and occasional fever. The symptoms may appear from a few days to a few months after exposure but usually within 2 to 4 weeks.

It is recommended to treat amebiasis. Treatment must be prescribed by a physician. The illness lasts about three weeks with medication, but can last for a long time if untreated. Some people with amebiasis may carry the parasite for weeks to years, often without symptoms.

How is Amebiasis spread?

The parasite lives only in humans therefore the parasite is excreted in human stools. Infections happen after eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by feces that contain the amoeba cysts. Water can be contaminated with human wastes where sewage disposal practices are poor. Another source of the parasite could be raw vegetables which can be contaminated if they are fertilized with human waste. Although, this is not permitted in Canada, it is a practice still followed in other parts of the world. Travelers are at a higher risk of acquiring this infection.

How do you prevent Amebiasis infections?

- **Hand washing is the best prevention.** Make sure hands are properly washed, using soap and water for at least 15 seconds, after using the washroom, handling diapers and before and after preparing or serving food.
- Clean and sanitize diaper changing area after each use
- Drink water from a safe supply. When traveling, boil water for at least 1 minute if you are unsure of the supply or use bottled water. Remember that ice cubes made from contaminated water may also carry the parasite.
- Avoid eating raw shell fish harvested from unknown sources
- Peel or wash all fruits and vegetables with boiled bottled water before eating.
- If ill with diarrhea, avoid preparing or handling food.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

Source: CIPHI Ontario

For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.

Amebiasis, ID-FS-ENT-01
February 2016