

What is amebiasis?

Amebiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a one-celled parasite (amoeba) called *Entamoeba*.

How is amebiasis spread?

Amebiasis is contracted by swallowing the cyst stage of the parasite in contaminated food or water. It can also be spread by person-to-person contact.

What are the signs and symptoms of amebiasis?

People exposed to this parasite may experience mild or severe symptoms or no symptoms at all. Fortunately, most exposed people do not become seriously ill. The mild form of amebiasis includes nausea, loose stools, weight loss, abdominal tenderness and occasional fever.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear from a few days to a few months after exposure but usually within two to four weeks. Some people with amebiasis may carry the parasite for weeks to years, often without symptoms.

Who is most at risk?

Although anyone can have this disease, it is most common in people who live in or travel to developing countries that have poor sanitary conditions. In the United States, amebiasis is most often found in immigrants from developing countries. Men who have

sex with men can become infected and can get sick from the infection, but they often do not have symptoms.

What type of health problems are caused by amebiasis?

Rarely, the parasite will spread to other parts of the body beyond the intestines, such as the brain, lung or liver.

Are there any special precautions for people who are infected with amebiasis?

Casual contact at work or school is unlikely to transmit the disease. Infected persons should refrain from oral-genital contact until effectively treated. Special precautions may be needed by food handlers or children enrolled in child care settings, or individuals in institutions for the developmentally disabled. Consult your local health department for advice in such instances.

How is amebiasis diagnosed?

Examination of stools under a microscope is the most common way for a doctor to diagnose amebiasis. Sometimes, several stool samples must be obtained because the number of parasites changes from day to day.

How is amebiasis treated?

Treatment depends on the severity of infection. Several antibiotics are available to treat amebiasis and must be prescribed by a physician.

How can amebiasis be prevented?

The most important precaution is careful hand washing before eating or preparing food and after each toilet visit. Proper disposal of sewage is also important.

When traveling in tropical countries where poor sanitation exists, drink purified or boiled water and do not eat uncooked vegetables or unpeeled fruit.

Public health measures include water purification, water chlorination, and sewage treatment programs.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 801-538-6191
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)

