

# Amebiasis

# FACTSHEET

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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
Division of Epidemiology, Disease Surveillance and Investigation  
899 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 580  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
(202) 442-9371 Fax (202) 442-8060  
[www.doh.dc.gov](http://www.doh.dc.gov)

## What is Amebiasis?

Amebiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite called *Entamoeba histolytic*.

## Who gets Amebiasis?

Anyone can get amebiasis, but it is recognized more often in people arriving from developing countries, individuals in institutions with poor sanitary conditions and some homosexual males.

## How do I get Amebiasis?

Infected people are sources of the parasite. The parasite is found in their stool or fecal matter. You can also contract amebiasis by swallowing food or water contaminated with *Entamoeba histolytic*. It can also be spread sexually through oral-anal contact.

## What are the symptoms of Amebiasis?

The symptoms usually appear in one to four weeks after exposure. You may experience mild or severe symptoms. Some individuals have no symptoms. 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. Rarely, the illness moves beyond the intestines and cause a more serious infection such as a liver abscess.

## For how long can an infected person carry this parasite?

Some people with amebiasis may carry the parasite for weeks to years, often without symptoms.

## How is it diagnosed?

Examination of stool under a microscope is the most common way for a doctor to diagnose amebiasis. Sometimes several stool samples may be required to make the diagnosis.

## What is the treatment for Amebiasis?

Antibiotics can be prescribed by a doctor to treat amebiasis.

## What should I do if I think I have Amebiasis?

See your healthcare provider and wash your hands frequently but especially after using the toilet, changing diapers and before preparing food or beverages.

## Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Generally, it is not necessary to exclude an infected person from work or school. Casual contact at work or school is unlikely to transmit the disease. Healthcare providers, food handlers and children enrolled in day care settings may need special precautions. Consult your local health department for advice in such instances.

## What precautions should the infected person follow?

The most important precautions are careful handwashing after each toilet visit and proper disposal of sewage. Homosexual males should refrain from intimate contact until effectively treated.

## What precautions should I take traveling out of the country or to an area with poor sanitary conditions?

- Drink only bottled or water that has been boiled for at least a one minute
- Don't drink from fountains or have ice cubes in your drinks
- Eat only fresh fruits or vegetables that were cleaned thoroughly by you prior to peeling.
- Don't eat from street vendors
- Don't drink or eat cheese, milk or dairy products that have not been pasteurized.

## Want more information?

Information on this disease and many other healthcare topics can be found at the Centers for Disease Control website [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and search under health topics A-Z or call 202-442-9371/9143.

