



# AMEBIASIS



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A parasitic infection of the intestines (bowels). Amebiasis is found worldwide, but occurs most often in developing countries. In the United States, the disease is fairly rare in the general population. It can affect all ages. Amebic dysentery is a rare, more severe form.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Only about 1 in 10 persons with the infection will have symptoms. Symptoms occur when the parasites (amoebas) invade the walls of the intestine.
- Diarrhea with bad-smelling stools. Constipation may alternate with diarrhea.
- Gas and stomach bloating, cramps, and tenderness.
- Amebic dysentery may cause bloody stools, stomach pain, chills, and fever.

### CAUSES

A parasite, *Entamoeba histolytica*. The infection starts when someone swallows amoeba cysts (they can't be seen) that contaminate food or water. The cysts travel to the intestines and can live there without causing symptoms. Then, for unknown reasons, the amoebas invade the intestine wall. When this happens, symptoms occur. Symptoms usually begin one to four weeks after exposure, but can take a few days or a year.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Immigrants from developing countries.
- Travel to a foreign country. In developing countries, the drinking water may be contaminated. In addition, some places use human feces for fertilizer.
- Anal/oral contact.
- Living in institutions where there are poor sanitary conditions.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- No specific preventive steps. No vaccine is available.
- Wash hands often to prevent spread of any germs.
- Travelers to countries where there is a risk of infection need to take proper precautions regarding food and drink.
- Avoid sexual practices that increase risk of infection.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

In most cases, amebiasis is curable in three weeks with treatment.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

The amoebas can travel through the blood stream to other parts of the body and cause infection in different organs. This can lead to an amebic liver abscess (pus-filled sore) or brain abscess.



## **DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT**

### **GENERAL MEASURES**

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask about your symptoms and recent travels. Medical tests may include blood and stool studies. If liver involvement is a concern, other tests may be done.
- Treatment is with drugs. A stool sample may be rechecked after treatment is complete to be sure the infection is cleared up.
- Amebiasis is contagious. Be extra careful about personal cleanliness. Bathe frequently. Wash hands with warm water and soap after each bowel movement and before handling food.
- In severe cases of dysentery, hospital care may be needed. Fluid replacement may be necessary to manage dehydration due to diarrhea.

### **MEDICATIONS**

Antibiotic drugs to treat amebiasis are usually prescribed. These are most often taken by mouth, but in some cases may be injected.

### **ACTIVITY**

Get extra rest until diarrhea and other symptoms improve.

### **DIET**

No special diet. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to help prevent dehydration.



## **NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF**

- You or a family member has symptoms of amebiasis.
- The following occur during treatment:

Abdominal cramps continue longer than 24 hours.

Diarrhea or blood in stool increases.

Vomiting begins.

Pain begins over liver or jaundice (yellow skin or eyes) occurs.

A skin rash appears.

