

Amebiasis



What Is It?

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

What Are the Symptoms?

On average, about 10 percent of people who are infected with *E. histolytica* become sick from the infection. The symptoms could be intestinal or outside the intestine. Intestinal symptoms are often quite mild and can include loose stools, stomach pain and stomach cramping. Amebic dysentery is a severe form of amebiasis associated with stomach pain, bloody stools and fever.

Rarely, *E. histolytica* invades the liver and forms an abscess. Even less commonly, it spreads to other parts of the body, such as the lungs or brain.

Examination of stools under a microscope is the most common way for a health care provider to diagnose amebiasis. Sometimes, several stool samples must be obtained.

Who Gets It and How?

Although anyone can have this disease, it is most common in people who live in developing countries that have poor sanitary conditions. In the United States, amebiasis is most often found in immigrants from developing countries. It also is found in people who have traveled to developing countries and in people who live in institutions with poor sanitary conditions. The illness is more severe in the very young, the elderly, and pregnant women.

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. Some people with amebiasis may carry the parasite for weeks to years, often without symptoms. Infection is transmitted by:

- Putting anything into your mouth that has touched the stool of a person infected with *E. histolytica*
- Swallowing something, such as water or food, contaminated with *E. histolytica*
- Touching and bringing to your mouth cysts picked

up from surfaces that are contaminated with *E. histolytica*

When Should People with this Illness Be Excluded?

A child in whom acute diarrhea develops while in child care should be moved to a separate area away from contact with other children until the child can be removed by a parent. Exclusion for acute diarrhea should continue until the diarrhea ceases.

A child with bloody stools needs to be examined by a health care provider and should receive antimicrobial therapy before readmission. Children without symptoms who pass cysts do not require exclusion from child care program. This illustrates the need for frequent hand washing and environmental cleaning in out-of-home child care facilities.

Where Should I Report It?

- Amebiasis is a reportable condition in California.
- Licensing requires that child care providers report to their local health department and to Licensing if there are two or more known or suspected cases of amebiasis in a child care program. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends that child care providers report even if there is only a single case, to ensure that the local Public Health Department is aware that this serious illness is present in a child care setting.
- It is important that parents monitor their children for any symptoms.

How Can I Limit the Spread of Amebiasis?

- Follow universal precautions and proper procedures for diapering, toilet use and toilet training.
- Proper hand washing procedure is the single most important measure for preventing infection.
- Follow guidelines for sanitary handling of food.
- Use safe drinking water.