



# Amebiasis

## **What is Amebiasis?**

Amebiasis is a disease caused by a one-celled parasite called *Entamoeba histolytica* (*ent-a-ME-ba his-to-LI-ti-ka*). This parasite can be found on hands, in food, water, soil or surfaces that have been contaminated with the stool of an infected individual. Amebiasis is more common in developing countries and those countries with poor sanitation.

## **How is it spread?**

Amebiasis is spread by swallowing the parasite through something that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person. Common examples are drinking water, recreational water, and raw or ready-to-eat foods. Coming in contact with surfaces contaminated with this parasite and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth may also cause infection. Some forms of sexual activity may also allow for the spread of amebiasis from one person to another.

## **What are the symptoms?**

Not everyone with amebiasis will become sick. Symptoms can be mild such as loose stools and abdominal cramping. In severe cases there may also be blood in the stools and fever. Symptoms usually begin 2 to 4 weeks after you are exposed to the parasite, but can range from a few days to several months or years.

Rarely amebiasis can make you sick in other parts of your body such as your liver, lungs or brain. People with underlying medical conditions, especially those with HIV/AIDS, may experience more severe symptoms which can lead to serious complications. Be sure to share your full medical history with your health care provider.

## **What is the treatment for Amebiasis?**

There are medications available for the treatment of amebiasis. See your health care provider to discuss these options. You may be diagnosed with *Entamoeba dispar*. This parasite looks very similar to *Entamoeba histolytica* under the microscope but does not cause illness.

*Entamoeba dispar* does not require treatment.

## **How do I protect myself and others?**

- Always wash your hands well with soap and water after using the toilet, before preparing or eating meals, after changing diapers, and after engaging in sexual activity.
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds and streams. The amount of chlorine used in routine water treatment does not always kill the parasite that causes amebiasis. If you are unsure of the safety of your drinking water, boil your water for 1 minute to destroy the parasite or use an approved filtration system that will remove it.
- Do not drink raw or unpasteurized milk and fruit juices.
- Thoroughly clean raw fruits and vegetables with treated water before eating.
- When travelling in countries where you are unsure of the water treatment and sanitation systems avoid tap water, or ice made from tap water. Drink bottled or boiled (for 1 minute). Peel all raw fruits and vegetables if you cannot be sure treated water was used to clean them. Eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot. Do not eat or drink items sold by street vendors.

## **Are there any special concerns about Amebiasis?**

If you are infected with amebiasis, and you provide services to others, particularly seniors or children, or are involved in food handling you should not go to work until you have been diarrhea free for 24 hours or 48 hours after you have completed treatment. To prevent spreading the disease to people around you avoid public recreational water while you are having symptoms and always practice good hand washing.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809