

What is Amebiasis?

Amebiasis is an intestinal disease caused by ingesting cysts of the parasite *Entamoeba histolytica*. It is also known as amebic dysentery. This illness is usually found where there is poor sanitation.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who are infected do not have symptoms. The most common symptoms are severe bloody or mucousy diarrhea, fever, chills and abdominal pain alternating with periods of constipation or remission. It usually takes two to four weeks for symptoms to appear.

How is it spread?

The disease is commonly spread by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by feces that contain the cysts. This parasite travels from feces to food by infected flies, poor hand washing by food handlers, or on fruit and vegetables fertilized with human waste. The use of human waste as fertilizer is not permitted in Canada. Sexual transmission can also occur by anal-oral contact. People who are infected and have no symptoms can spread the disease without knowing it.

How is it treated?

Medication prescribed by a health care provider can be taken to kill the parasite. The illness lasts about three weeks with medication, but can last a long time if untreated.

How is it prevented?

- Thorough hand washing is the best prevention.
- Sewage disposed of in a sanitary manner, municipal or private septic system eliminates this risk.
- Use water supplies known to be safe or, if unsure, use bottled water or water that has been boiled for one minute, especially when travelling.
- Travellers to areas with poor sanitary conditions should only eat thoroughly cooked foods, served hot.
- Wash all raw fruits and vegetables with safe water.
- Avoid preparing or handling food if ill with diarrhea.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health, Amebiasis, March 2010
- Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors, Amebiasis, 2001

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