

## Amebiasis Fact Sheet

### What is amebiasis?

Amebiasis is an infection caused by a one-celled parasite called *Entamoeba histolytica* (*E. histolytica*).

### How common is amebiasis in California?

Amebiasis is uncommon in California, with about 300 cases reported per year.

### How does a person get amebiasis?

A person can get amebiasis when they:

- Swallow food or water contaminated with *E. histolytica*
- Put anything into their mouth that is contaminated with the feces of a person infected with *E. histolytica*
- Touch surfaces contaminated with *E. histolytica* and then put their fingers in their mouth

### Who is at risk for getting amebiasis?

Amebiasis is more common among people living in developing tropical countries with untreated water, poor sanitation, and limited access to toilets. These countries include India, parts of Central and South America, and parts of Africa.

People living in the United States do not often get amebiasis. Those at greater risk include:

- People who have traveled to or immigrated from developing tropical countries
- People living in housing without access to clean water and proper toilets/sanitation
- Men who have sex with men

### What are the symptoms of amebiasis?

The symptoms of amebiasis can begin two to four weeks after being infectedd. Only 10%–20% of those infected ever develop symptoms.

Symptoms are often mild and may include:

- fatigue or tiredness
- watery or bloody diarrhea
- excessive intestinal gas
- stomach cramps
- weight loss
- fever

Rarely, *E. histolytica* can invade the liver and cause an abscess (a collection of pus), or spread outside of the intestines to other organs. Those with a weakened immune system may become seriously ill and have more severe symptoms.

### **What should I do if I think I have amebiasis?**

If you think you have amebiasis, you should see your health care provider.

### **How is amebiasis diagnosed?**

Amebiasis is diagnosed by testing a sample of your feces (also known as a stool sample). Diagnosis of amebiasis can be difficult and *E. histolytica* may not be found in the first stool sample, so additional samples may be needed. Your health care provider may also test your blood to check if the disease has spread to the liver or other parts of the body.

### **How is amebiasis treated?**

Health care providers treat amebiasis using antiparasitic or antimicrobial drugs.

### **How can I prevent amebiasis?**

People come in contact with *E. histolytica* most often while traveling in developing countries. To avoid getting amebiasis while traveling:

- Do not eat or drink anything sold by street vendors.
- Do not drink fountain drinks or use ice cubes.
- Drink bottled water that is sealed; or if drinking tap water, make sure it was boiled for at least 1 minute, treated with iodine tablets, or filtered through an “absolute 1 micron or less” filter.
- Drink carbonated drinks in bottles or cans
- Eat only fresh fruits or vegetables that you peel yourself.
- Eat or drink only pasteurized dairy products.
- Eat only food that has been cooked thoroughly and is served steaming hot.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before handling food and after using the toilet.

More information on food and water safety while traveling can be found on the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) website](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/food-water-safety) (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/food-water-safety>).

### **What is being done about amebiasis in California?**

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and local health departments monitor amebiasis in California. If a large increase in cases is reported, CDPH and local health departments will investigate to find the cause, fix the problem, and educate the public.

To help prevent spread of amebiasis to others, LHDs may restrict persons with amebiasis from certain types of work (such as food handling) until tests prove that their feces no longer contains *E. histolytica*.

### **Should I be worried about spreading *E. histolytica* to the rest of my family?**

Yes, but the risk of spreading the infection is low if the infected person is taking antibiotics and practices good personal hygiene. This includes thorough hand washing with soap and water after using the toilet or changing diapers, and before handling food.

**Where can I find more information about amebiasis?**

[The California Department of Public Health, Surveillance and Statistics Section](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/YearlySummariesofSelectedCommDiseasesinCA2011-2016.pdf)

(<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/YearlySummariesofSelectedCommDiseasesinCA2011-2016.pdf>)

[The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/amebiasis/)

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