



August 2011

Community and Health Services Department



Amebiasis (Amebic Dysentery)

What is amebiasis?

Amebiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a tiny parasite (amoeba) called *Entamoeba histolytica*. Anyone can get amebiasis, but it occurs more often in the following groups:

- People travelling from developing countries where there are poor sanitary conditions
- Individuals in institutions for the developmentally disabled
- Individuals who engage in sexual practices that may permit fecal-oral transmission

The illness lasts about three weeks with medication, but can last for a long time if untreated. Some people with amebiasis may carry the parasite for weeks to years, often without symptoms.

What are the symptoms of amebiasis?

Some people may not develop any symptoms, while others may experience mild symptoms such as nausea, loose stools, weight loss, abdominal cramps, and occasionally fever. The symptoms may appear from a few days to a few months after exposure, but usually within two to four weeks.

Few people become seriously ill, but in rare cases, the parasite can invade the body beyond the intestines and cause a more serious infection such as acute or fulminating dysentery or a liver abscess.

How does amebiasis spread?

A person can become infected with amebiasis by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated by feces that contain the amoeba cysts. Cysts can survive in moist conditions for weeks to months.

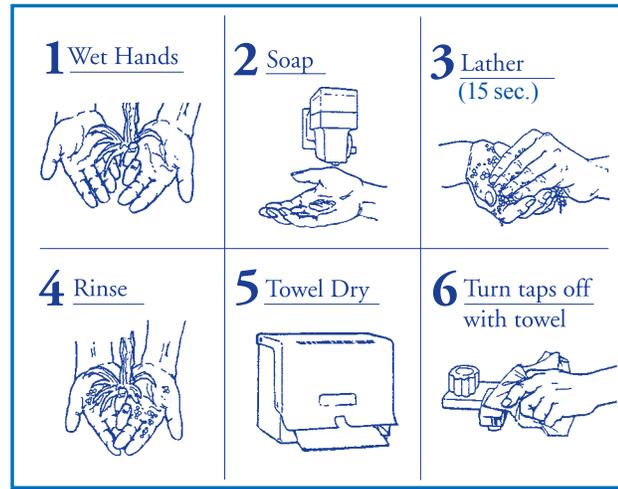
Humans are the only host for this parasite. Animals do not become infected with or carry the parasite, although in some parts of the world, flies may transfer amoeba cysts from human stool to fruits and vegetables.

Information sheet

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

How can amebiasis be prevented?

- Thorough hand washing is the best prevention. Wash hands carefully with soap and water, using the 6-step method (see diagram below), before preparing or eating food, after changing diapers, and after using the toilet



- Proper disposal of sewage
- Avoid sexual practices that may permit fecal-oral transmission until effectively treated with antibiotics
- If ill with diarrhea, avoid preparing or handling food
- If travelling to a country that has poor sanitary conditions:
 - Drink water from a safe supply. If you are unsure of the supply, drink bottled water or boil water to a rolling boil for one minute. Remember that ice cubes made from contaminated water may also carry the parasite
 - Avoid eating raw shellfish harvested from unknown sources
 - Wash all fruits and vegetables with bottled water or peel before eating

Is there a treatment for amebiasis?

Yes, treatment is recommended for amebiasis and must be prescribed by a physician.

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