



CALHOUN COUNTY  
**Public Health Department**

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190 E Michigan Ave  
Battle Creek, MI 49014

[calhouncountymi.gov/publichealth](http://calhouncountymi.gov/publichealth)  
269-969-6370

Fact Sheet

## **Amebiasis**

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### **What is amebiasis?**

Amebiasis is a disease caused by a one-celled parasite called *Entamoeba histolytica*.

### **Who gets amebiasis?**

Although anyone can have this disease, it is more common in people who live in tropical areas with poor sanitary conditions. In the United States, amebiasis is most often found in travelers to and immigrants from these areas, people who live in institutions that have poor sanitary conditions, and men who have sex with men.

### **How do you get amebiasis?**

Amebiasis is transmitted by:

- Putting anything into your mouth that has touched the stool of a person who is infected with *E. histolytica*.
- Swallowing something, such as water or food, that is contaminated with *E. histolytica*.
- Swallowing *E. histolytica* cysts (eggs) picked up from surfaces or fingers that are contaminated with *E. histolytica*.

### **What are the symptoms of amebiasis?**

Only about 10% to 20% of people who are infected with *E. histolytica* become sick from the infection. Those people who do become sick usually develop symptoms within 2 to 4 weeks, although this may range from several weeks or longer.

The symptoms often are 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.

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

Diagnosis of amebiasis can be very difficult. *Entamoeba histolytica* and another amoeba, *Entamoeba dispar*, which is about 10 times more common, look the same when seen under a microscope so it is hard to sometimes identify which one it is.

Your health care provider will ask you to submit stool samples. Because *E. histolytica* is not always found in every stool sample, you may be asked to submit several stool samples from several different days.

A blood test is also available but is only recommended when your healthcare provider thinks that your infection may have spread beyond the intestine (gut) to some other organ of your body, such as the liver. However, this blood test may not be helpful in diagnosing your current illness because the test can be positive if you had amebiasis in the past, even if you are not infected now.

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

Several antibiotics are available to treat amebiasis. A physician must prescribe treatment. You will be treated with only one antibiotic if your *E. histolytica* infection has not made you sick. You probably will be treated with two antibiotics (first one and then the other) if your infection has made you sick.

### **How can amebiasis be prevented?**

When traveling to countries with poor sanitation:

- Drink only bottled or boiled (for 1 minute) water or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in sealed cans or bottles.
- Make tap water safe by filtering it through an "absolute 1 micron or less" filter **and** dissolving chlorine, chlorine dioxide, or iodine tablets in the filtered water. "Absolute 1 micron" filters can be found in camping/outdoor supply stores.
- Do **not** drink fountain drinks or any drinks with ice cubes.
- Do **not** eat fresh fruit or vegetables that you did not peel yourself.
- Do **not** eat or drink milk, cheese, or dairy products that may not have been pasteurized.
- Do **not** eat or drink anything sold by street vendors.

## **How do I get more information on amebiasis?**

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: 269-969-6383

 [www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/](https://www.facebook.com/CCPublicHealthDepartment/)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-232-4636 (800-CDC-INFO)

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/amebiasis/>

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