

AMOEBIC DYSENTERY

A- Definition and types

Dysentery is an infection of the intestines causing diarrhea that contains blood or mucus.

There are two main types of dysentery:

- * Bacillary dysentery or Shigellosis, caused by the Shigella bacteria. This form of dysentery is more common in Europe or the Americas.
- * Amoebic dysentery or Amoebiasis, caused by a parasite called Entamoeba Histolytica. This form of dysentery is more common abroad in tropical countries.

B- Causes of amoebic dysentery

Once inside the body, amoeba forms a cyst that is protected by the stomach's digestive acid. When the cyst passes through the intestines, it breaks open infecting the body. The amoebae burrow into the intestinal wall and cause small ulcers. Cysts exit the body via feces but are still able to live outside, which is how many people become infected.

Severe dysentery is more common in developing countries due to compromised hygiene.

You can get sick in a number of ways including:

- * Eating contaminated food
- * Drinking contaminated water
- * Contracting dysentery from another infected person.

C- Symptoms of amoebic dysentery

Symptoms can appear as many as 10 days after exposure and infection by the parasite. Signs of infection include:

- * Watery diarrhea with blood or pus in it
- * Nausea or vomiting
- * Stomach pain
- * High temperature
- * Chills
- * Bleeding from rectum
- * Weight loss
- * Loss of appetite

D- Complications of amoebic dysentery

If the parasite gets into your bloodstream it can spread to other parts of your body, including the liver.

When this happens there is the risk of developing a liver abscess. Symptoms include: High temperature, Weakness, Cough, Jaundice (yellowish color on skin and sclera), Nausea, Loss of appetite, Weight loss.

Symptoms can last from a few days to a few weeks. Untreated, even if symptoms go away, parasites can live in the bowel for months or years.

E- Diagnosis of amoebic dysentery

If the person shows the above symptoms of amoebic dysentery or if has diarrhea with blood or mucus, medical advice should be sought for.

The doctor may:

- * Request a stool sample to check for bacteria or parasites
- * Arrange an ultrasound if a liver abscess is suspected
- * Carry out a blood test for antibodies
- * Arrange a colonoscopy to check the bowels

F- Treatment of amoebic dysentery

In some cases, dysentery clears up after a few days and no treatment is needed.

Generally, diarrhea is treated with: Plenty of fluids to combat dehydration, Oral rehydration solutions, Eating when possible. If symptoms do not clear up, the doctor may prescribe antimicrobial medication.

G- Prevention of amoebic dysentery

Amoebic dysentery is spread by poor hygiene, so make sure you:

- * Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after going to the toilet and before eating
- * Avoid unclean kitchens or lavatories
- * Avoid contact with infected people
- * Avoid sharing towels
- * Wash towels used by infected people on a hot wash.

If travelling abroad:

- * Avoid tap water and use bottled water or drinks with an unbroken seal
- * If to use tap water, boil it or use water-purifying tablets or filters (for sale in supermarkets)
- * Avoid drinks with ice in them
- * Avoid unpasteurized milk or dairy products
- * Avoid raw fruit or vegetables
- * If planning to do so, use light chlorine solutions already prepared for that purpose and for sale at supermarkets. Usually, they are ready to be used directly without further dilution (always see instructions in package/container)
- * Eat cooked food when it's served piping hot
- * Avoid food sold by street vendors