

Patient information from BMJ

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Amoebic dysentery: prevention

Amoebic dysentery, or amoebiasis, is an infection in your intestines (bowels) caused by a type of organism called an amoeba. You're most likely to get it if you've been travelling in a developing country. This information tells you how you can help prevent it happening to you.

You usually get amoebic dysentery after eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water. It's more common in countries where people don't have clean running water or may have difficulty keeping kitchens and toilets clean.

If you're travelling in or if you live in an area where dysentery is a problem, there are some things you can do to try to avoid getting it.

Water

- Don't drink tap water.
- Don't drink drinks served with ice in them. Ice is usually made from tap water.
- Instead of tap water, drink bottled water (with an unbroken seal), fizzy drinks, or hot coffee or tea.
- You can make water safe to drink by bringing it to a full boil for a few minutes.
- You can also use water-purifying tablets and a filter to make water safe to drink. You can buy these from camping shops.
- Don't use the tap water, even to brush your teeth, unless you're sure it's safe.
- Don't swallow any water while you're taking a bath or a shower.
- Don't swim in water that might be contaminated.

Food hygiene

- Avoid drinking unpasteurised milk or eating dairy products made from unpasteurised milk.
- Avoid eating raw fruits and vegetables unless you can peel them yourself.
- Don't eat cooked food that isn't piping hot when it's served.

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- Don't eat food from street vendors.
- Wash your hands after going to the toilet and before eating.

If you become ill with diarrhoea after you've been travelling, it's important to tell your doctor about where you travelled to. It will affect the kind of treatment you need.

Your doctor can advise you about making sure you don't pass on the infection to other people. If you work with food or if you're a healthcare worker, you may need to stay off work until your doctor gives you the 'all-clear' to return to work.

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