



## Enteric Diseases and Sexual Health

**Note:** Content contains mature language

### What are enteric diseases?

Enteric diseases affect your stomach or intestines. They can cause symptoms like diarrhea, fever, or stomach cramps. Enteric diseases can be caused by a variety of germs. These germs typically enter the body through the mouth. They are acquired through contaminated food and water, by contact with animals or their environments, or by contact with the feces (poop) of an infected person. Often, the germs are spread to food, water, or surfaces by the hands of an infected person who has not washed properly after using the bathroom. But it is also possible to get these infections through sexual contact.

### How can sexual contact expose you to enteric diseases?

Any type of sexual contact that may put you in contact with feces, even if it is not visible, is a risk for infection with one or more of these germs. Anal sex and oral-genital contact have some risk, but oral stimulation such as sucking or licking of the anus (anilingus, rimming) may be especially risky.

### How can you reduce your risk of exposure to these germs during sexual contact?

- Avoid sexual activity with people who have diarrhea or who recently had diarrhea. Some germs can still be passed on 2-3 weeks after symptoms clear. Ask your partner(s) before sex if they have been ill recently.
- Reduce contact with fecal matter during sex.
  - Wash your genitals, anus, and hands before and after sexual activity.
  - Use barriers such as condoms or dental dams during oral sex and oral-anal sex. Gloves (preferably latex) should be used during anal fingering or fisting.
  - Use condoms during anal and vaginal sex to help reduce the risk of getting other sexually transmitted infections.

### What else can you do to reduce your risk of exposure to these germs through other types of exposure?

To avoid catching these germs through any type of exposure:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, including:
  - Before eating
  - Before cooking
  - After changing a diaper
  - After using the bathroom
  - After helping to clean another person who has defecated (pooped)
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming at lakes, rivers or oceans. Lakes, rivers, and the ocean can be contaminated with germs from sewage spills, animal waste, and water runoff following rainfall. Some common germs can also live for long periods of time in salt water. Click [here](#) to learn more about recreational water illnesses.
- When traveling internationally, follow food and water precautions. Remember to wash hands with water and soap frequently.

Avoiding enteric germs could also be important for your work life. Workers that handle food or medications (chef, waiter, caterer, healthcare providers, etc.) who catch these germs cannot work until they have completely recovered and all symptoms have resolved. In general, under public health regulations, **food handlers must stay out of work for 72 hours after their symptoms have resolved. However, exclusion guidelines may differ based on the type of disease.** They may even need to have their feces (poop) tested to show they are no longer infected. This could mean up to several weeks of being excluded from work (often without pay!).

To learn more about specific enteric diseases, go to [www.bphc.org/AZ](http://www.bphc.org/AZ).

