

Clostridium Difficile Infection

Patient and Visitor Information

What is Clostridium difficile (C. difficile or C. Diff)?

Clostridium difficile is one of the many bacteria that can be found in our bowel.

What is C. difficile Disease?

Normally our bowel is full of good bacteria. Sometimes, when we take antibiotics, they kill not only the bacteria causing infection, but our good bacteria too. This allows Clostridium difficile to grow and produce toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause mild to severe diarrhea.

Clostridium difficile is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospital. The main symptoms of Clostridium difficile disease are:

- ✓ Watery diarrhea
- ✓ Fever
- ✓ Abdominal pain or tenderness

Who gets C. difficile?

Clostridium difficile disease usually occurs during or after the use of antibiotics. Old age, presence of other serious illnesses and poor overall health may increase the risk of severe disease.

How will your Doctor know that you have C. difficile?

If you have symptoms of Clostridium difficile, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if Clostridium difficile is present.

How is C. difficile treated?

Treatment depends on how sick you are with the disease. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe disease, an antibiotic is given. In some severe cases, surgery may be needed and in extreme cases Clostridium difficile may cause death. It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should not use any drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium®). If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor.

How does C. difficile spread?

When a person has Clostridium difficile disease the bacteria in the stool can soil surfaces such as toilets, sink handles, bedpans, commode chairs, or anything within a patient's room. When touching these items our hands can become contaminated with C.diff. If we then touch our mouth or other surfaces before washing our contaminated hands can spread the infection to ourselves or others. Because Clostridium difficile can live on objects in your room, it will be cleaned twice daily.

How to prevent spread?

If you have Clostridium difficile diarrhea while in the hospital you will be moved to a private room and your activities outside the room will be restricted. Healthcare providers call this isolation and you will remain in isolation until you are free from diarrhea for at least 2 days. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom. You are still able to have visitors but everyone **MUST** clean their hands when leaving your room. Cleaning hands is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of this disease.

What should I do at home?

Healthy people like our family and friends who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting Clostridium difficile disease.

Hand hygiene

Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds:

- ✓ After using the toilet
- ✓ Before eating or preparing meals

Cleaning the house

Use either a household cleaner, diluted according to the instructions or dilute household bleach:

- ✓ Wet the surface well and clean using good friction
- ✓ Allow the surface to air dry
- ✓ Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with stool such as the toilet and sink. If you see stool remove first and then clean as described above.

Cleaning clothes/ other fabric

Wash clothes/fabric separately if they are heavily soiled with stool:

- ✓ Rinse stool off,
- ✓ Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- ✓ Dry items in the dryer if possible.

Cleaning dishes

No special cleaning is required; you can use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water.

*Reference: The Ontario College of Pharmacists
GBHS Infection Control Department*