

Clostridium difficile

Information for patients, carers and relatives

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile is one of the many bacteria (germs) that are found in the gut / bowel. About three per cent of healthy adults in the community carry C. difficile in their bowel. It usually lives there harmlessly.

Sometimes, however, having antibiotics can affect the normal balance of bacteria in the bowel.

If this happens, C. difficile may have a chance to multiply and cause symptoms (infection).

How would a C. difficile infection affect me?

The symptoms of C. difficile infection can vary: some people have no symptoms, while others will notice diarrhoea of varying severity, abdominal (tummy) pain or tenderness, nausea (feeling sick) and sometimes a high temperature.

How is C. difficile identified?

Our nurses will ask patients with recognised symptoms of C. difficile to provide a sample of faeces which will be sent to the laboratory to be examined.

How are patients with Clostridium infection cared for?

A patient with C. difficile infection will be nursed in a side room to prevent the bacteria spreading to other patients on the ward.

How is it treated?

Fortunately most patients only develop mild diarrhoea that stops once the antibiotics have stopped. Adequate fluid intake is also important.

A specific medicine is sometimes required and this can be taken by mouth. In some patients diarrhoea may return in which case a further course of medicine is required.

As soon as your diarrhoea stops and you start to pass stool normally then you will no longer need to be nursed separately.

How can the spread of the bacteria be minimised?

By thorough hand-washing using soap and water by everyone involved in your care. Alcohol hand rub is ineffective for the C. difficile bacterial spores and therefore not advised. Doctors, nurses, and other staff who care for patients with C. difficile will wear gloves and aprons when attending to them and clean their hands with soap and water each time. This helps prevent the spread of infection to other patients.

Cleaning must be of a high standard because the bacteria can remain in the environment for long periods. Your bed area and surrounding surfaces must be kept tidy to allow all surfaces to be cleaned daily.

Are my visitors at risk of infection?

No. *C. difficile* does not usually cause diarrhoea in healthy people. Your visitors should wash their hands with soap and water before and after visiting you.

If they are assisting in your care, they will need to wear gloves and aprons; when removing these, hands need to be washed with soap and water. Alcohol hand rub is not effective against this bacterium so always use soap and water.

Should I take any special precautions when I leave hospital?

Provided you are well enough and you are medically fit, you can go home. If the diarrhoea restarts, tell your GP straight away; we will have written to your GP on discharge to tell them you have had *C. difficile* while in hospital.

Good hand hygiene (routine washing) and keeping your home clean are all that's needed.

Wash hands with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and before handling food.

Clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas on a regular basis with household detergent.

If you still have diarrhoea, any soiled clothes, bedding and towels etc should be washed separately in a washing machine at the highest temperature possible for that fabric. You do not have to separate your washing after the diarrhoea has stopped.

For more information

You can find out more about *Clostridium difficile* by:

- Asking your community hospital nursing staff or doctor
- Asking your GP or practice nurse.

Infection control

This leaflet is one in a series about infection control. Others in the series are:

- Preventing and controlling healthcare associated infections
- MRSA
- Norovirus