

Clostridium difficile

Infection Control Team Patient Information Leaflet

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (sometimes called C. diff) is a type of bacteria. They live in the intestine of a small proportion (less than five per cent) of healthy adults. They are normally kept in check by normal 'good' bacteria that live in the intestine so they are harmless and do not cause infection.

However, infection can occur after someone has taken antibiotics to treat another illness. This kills off the 'good' bacteria as well as the 'bad' ones and allows C. diff to multiply and produce toxins (poisons) which damage the cells lining the intestine. This can lead to diarrhoea and inflammation of the bowel.

Who is at risk?

Elderly patients with other underlying diseases are most at risk of infection. More than 80 per cent of cases are in people over 65 years of age. However, infection can occur in anyone who has:

- Been treated with antibiotics
- Had surgery to their digestive system
- Has an immune system which is not working properly

Most infections occur in hospital or nursing homes but they can occur in the community as well.

How do C. diff bacteria spread?

C. diff bacteria come out in stools in the form of spores. A patient with C. diff excretes large numbers of spores which can live in the environment for a long time. These spores contaminate the surfaces and equipment surrounding patients such as lockers, commodes and bedpans.

These areas can be a source of infection for other patients, if they touch these surfaces and then touch their nose or mouth. The risk of infection increases when patients have diarrhoea and bathrooms and toilets are shared.

C. diff bacteria can be spread from one person to another by poor hand hygiene (not enough hand washing).

What are the symptoms of a C. diff infection?

Some people can be carriers of the bacteria and have no symptoms. However, C. diff can cause diarrhoea, ranging from mild to severe illness. Other symptoms include:

- Stomach cramps
- Fever
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite

How do I know if I have a C. diff infection?

A sample of diarrhoea is sent to the hospital laboratory where the diagnosis can be confirmed.

Are there any complications?

In severe cases, patients can suffer ulceration and bleeding from the colon (colitis). At worst, the intestine may tear leading to peritonitis. This is an infection of the tissue layer that lines the inside of the abdomen.

What is the treatment?

Some patients only develop a mild illness and if they stop taking their antibiotics, the diarrhoea stops. However, it may be necessary for your doctor to prescribe specific antibiotics that can treat the C. diff bacteria.

Diarrhoea can lead to dehydration so replacing fluid either by mouth or intravenous (into a vein) drip is important. The medical team will ensure that you are receiving enough fluid.

How will C. diff infection affect my care?

To prevent the infection spreading to other patients, you will be moved to a side room until your diarrhoea settles. Staff will wear gloves and aprons to look after you.

Hand washing is an important measure in controlling the spread of C. diff. Staff should always wash their hands after physical contact with a patient as alcohol gel does not kill C. diff spores. The cleaners will use a bleach solution in your room to reduce contamination of the surrounding environment with spores.

Will my treatment be delayed?

Your treatment will continue, with staff taking the correct precautions. Non-urgent investigations may be delayed, if you are experiencing severe diarrhoea.

Can I have visitors?

Visitors who are healthy have very little risk of getting a C. diff infection. It is important that all visitors wash their hands as they come and go. Your visitors do not need to wear gloves and aprons unless they are helping with your personal care.

Visitors who are unwell, for example, taking antibiotics or upset tummy, should stay away until they are better. If you are in doubt, discuss this with the nurse looking after you.

Can my washing be sent home?

It is strongly advised that you wear hospital nightwear while you have diarrhoea. This will prevent your relatives having to carry infected laundry home. However, if this is not possible, please discuss this with the nursing staff.

How long will I be infectious?

Once you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours you are no longer infectious.

Can I go home?

Providing you feel well enough, there is no reason why you cannot return home. Your medical team must be satisfied that you are fit for discharge. If you are being discharged to a nursing or residential home, you must have no diarrhoea for 48 hours before discharge.

Do I need any special care once I am at home?

If you have had C. diff in hospital, you do not need any special care once you return home although it is a good idea to wash your hands regularly and keep your environment clean. The symptoms of diarrhoea should have gone and your bowels should have started working normally.

Can C. diff come back?

Some patients (20 to 30 per cent) may suffer from further episodes of diarrhoea. Please contact your GP if you develop diarrhoea after discharge from hospital, as you may need further courses of antibiotic treatment.

I am worried – who can I talk to?

If you want to discuss C. diff further, you can talk to:

- Your medical team
- The Infection Control Team on 01384 244174 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Where do I find more information?

You can obtain further information from:

Public Health England at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/clostridium-difficile-guidance-data-and-analysis>

Department of Health at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Infection Control Team on 01384 244174 (8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/about-us/quality/infection-control/patient-information-leaflets/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email dgft.patient.information@nhs.net

This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.

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此宣传单可提供大字版本、音频版本和其它语言版本，请拨打电话：0800 073 0510。

Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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