

Can I still have visitors?

Yes – you can still have visitors however you should limit your contact with others until you have had 48 hours without diarrhea. Encourage your visitors to perform hand hygiene before and after they enter your room using soap and water.

What happens when I go home?

When you return home it is important for you, your family and your friends to continue the good hand hygiene practices that you have been taught in hospital. Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and eat plain foods such as soup, rice, pasta and bread if you feel hungry. Don't take anti-diarrhoeal medication, as this can stop the infection being cleared from your body.

Where can I get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department ask your nurse to contact us.

References

National Health and Medical Research Council, Healthcare Associated Infection
Clostridium difficile Consumer factsheet, August 2013. August 2013
National Health Services (NHS) Scotland, Clostridium difficile fact sheet. April 2020
Department of health, Government of South Australian
Clostridium difficile infection (CDI) V3.3 July 2018



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Clostridium difficile

Patient Information



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About Clostridium difficile

Clostridium difficile, also known as C. difficile or C. diff, is a bacteria commonly found in the digestive tract. It does not cause infection or disease by its presence alone, however it can infect the bowel and cause diarrhea.

How does C.difficile cause infection?

When the normal balance of bacteria in the gut is disturbed, most commonly due to antibiotics, Clostridium difficile can multiply to levels where the toxins it produces causes illness such as diarrhoea and severe inflammation of the bowel. This is when you are said to have a Clostridium difficile infection.

Symptoms of a C. difficile infection

Symptoms of a C. difficile infection usually develop when you're taking antibiotics, or when you've finished taking them within the last few weeks.

The most common symptoms are:

- watery diarrhoea, which can be bloody
- painful tummy cramps
- loss of appetite and weight loss
- nausea
- abdominal pain or tenderness
- fever

Diarrhoea can be caused by a number of conditions and is a common side effect of antibiotics, so having diarrhoea while taking antibiotics doesn't necessarily mean you have a C. difficile infection. You can also have Clostridium difficile and have no symptoms.

Who's most at risk of C. difficile?

C. difficile mostly affects people who:

- have been treated with broad-spectrum antibiotics (antibiotics that work against several types of bacteria) or several different antibiotics at the same time, or those taking long-term antibiotics
- have had to stay in a healthcare setting, such as a hospital or care home, for a long time
- have certain underlying conditions, including inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), cancer or kidney disease
- have a weakened immune system, which can be because of a condition such as diabetes or a side effect of a treatment such as chemotherapy or steroid medication
- are taking a medication called a proton pump inhibitor (PPI) to reduce the amount of stomach acid they produce
- have had surgery on their digestive system

How to stop C. difficile spreading

C. difficile infections can be passed on very easily. You can reduce your risk of picking it up or spreading it by practising good hygiene, both at home and in healthcare settings.

The following measures can help:

- stay at home until at least 48 hours after your symptoms have cleared up
- wash your hands regularly with soap and water, particularly after going to the toilet and before eating – use liquid rather than bar soap and don't use flannels or nail brushes
- clean contaminated surfaces – such as the toilet, flush handle, light switches and door handles – with a bleach-based cleaner after each use
- don't share towels and flannels
- wash contaminated clothes and sheets separately from other washing at the highest possible temperature

- when visiting someone in hospital, observe any visiting guidelines, avoid taking any children under the age of 12, and wash your hands with liquid soap and water when entering and leaving ward areas – don't rely on alcohol hand gels, as they're not effective against C. difficile

How will my care change whilst in hospital?

You will be managed using infection control contact precautions until you are discharged.

A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use protective infection control contact precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.

The hospital staff will wear protective clothing such as gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room. These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin as the staff member leaves your room.

Good hand hygiene practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent ALL infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to maintain good hand hygiene practices every day.

Hand Washing Alternative - Alcohol based hand rub / gel.

During your stay in hospital you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long as your hands are not visibly soiled / dirty.