

Infection Prevention and Control Department

Clostridium difficile

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (sometimes referred to as C-diff) is a bacteria (germ) that lives harmlessly in the bowel (gut) of approximately 3% of healthy adults. We all have many types of harmless bacteria that live in our gut and keep other more harmful bacteria like C-diff under control.

What causes a Clostridium difficile infection?

Antibiotics are considered the most significant factor associated with C-diff infection. When you take antibiotics for an infection (e.g. a chest infection) they not only attack the bacteria infecting your lungs but also many of the harmless bacteria living in your gut, allowing C-diff to grow in greater numbers and produce toxins. Other factors which affect the balance of bacteria in your gut include gut surgery/procedures, having conditions which affect your gut and the use of gastric acid medications.

What are the symptoms?

The C-diff toxins cause inflammation to the wall of the gut. This causes diarrhoea, often with mucous. Other symptoms include fever and abdominal pain. In severe cases the inflammation of the gut can cause bloody diarrhoea, fever, abdominal swelling and requires urgent medical attention.

How is it spread?

C-diff is present in the diarrhoea of someone with the infection. Once out of the body, C-diff produces spores (like seeds) which can survive in the environment for many months. These spores can be picked up on hands and ingested (swallowed) which can result in C-diff residing in the gut (harmlessly) or causing a C-diff infection.

What is the treatment?

Sometimes all that is needed is to stop any antibiotics you are taking, but you should never do this without speaking to your doctor to decide if it is safe to do so. Those with more severe infection will normally be given a different antibiotic to treat the infection. It is important to complete the course even if your diarrhoea settles down and you begin to feel better.

It is also important to drink plenty of fluids to replace some of the fluids that are lost by having diarrhoea. In some cases extra fluid and medication is given in hospital. In rare cases surgery is needed if the gut perforates. It is not advisable to take medicines designed to stop diarrhoea like Loperamide if you have a C-diff infection – they can increase the risk of complications.

How can I help while in hospital?

You have an important role in reducing the risks of infection spreading, the main one being hand hygiene. Even if your hands appear clean, the C-diff spores cannot be seen and may be present. This is especially important after using the toilet and before eating and drinking. (See the method we advise on the wall by the sink). Do not use the alcohol hand gel as this is not effective against C-diff spores.

You will be allocated a side room and the door of the room needs to be kept closed to prevent the spread of infection. Your room needs to be cleaned twice a day and you can help with this by keeping tidy and clutter free. Further details about the standards to be met in your side room are on the red poster in your room.

Will my family members and friends be at risk?

People in good health do not usually get a C-diff infection (including pregnant women and children), as long as they wash their hands.

How will I know when the infection has gone?

When your normal bowel habit returns, it is considered the infection has gone. There is no need for a follow-up test.

What happens when I go home?

Having C-diff does not stop you going home but some of the things you have been following in hospital should continue at home while you still have symptoms:

- Wash hands with soap and water especially after using the toilet, before preparing and eating food and handling soiled linen /clothing
- Nutrition - Maintain a good diet and fluid intake.
- Cleaning - We would recommend that following cleaning with your usual cleaning products, you use a bleach based product in the bathroom and toilet.
- Laundry - Any soiled items of clothing/bedding should be washed separately at the highest temperature the care label recommends.

If your diarrhoea returns you should contact your GP immediately.

What precautions should my personal carer/nurse take?

Our staff will wear disposable gloves and aprons when caring for you and be careful to wash their hands effectively with soap and water.

When can I return to work?

You can return to work once your infection has gone (48 hours free of symptoms). If you work within healthcare or the food industry you should inform your manager/occupational health department you have had a C-diff infection.

What if I need to take antibiotics in the future?

If you need antibiotics in the future it does not mean you will definitely develop this infection again, but do tell the healthcare professionals caring for you that you have had C-diff in the past or show them your Clostridium difficile card.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Infection Prevention and Control Nurses at
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary Telephone No. (01484) 342447
or
at Calderdale Royal Hospital Telephone (01422) 222376
www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور فارمیٹ کی زبان میں درکار ہوں، تو
برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

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