



Communicable Diseases Clostridium Difficile (C. Diff)

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

C. difficile (also known as *Clostridium difficile*) is a bacteria that produces a toxin (a type of poison) that can cause an inflammation of the intestinal tract/stomach.

What are the symptoms of *C. difficile*?

The usual symptoms are diarrhea, fever and abdominal pain. In some cases there may not be diarrhea. Blood may or may not be present in stools.

How did I get it?

C. difficile can be part of the normal bacteria that live in the large intestine. It can also be acquired in the large intestine after hospital stays. Taking certain antibiotics can change the normal balance of bacteria in your large intestine making it easier for *C. difficile* to grow and cause an infection. *C. difficile* has also been found on the hands of persons and in the environment surrounding infected patients.

What can I do about it?

If a *C. difficile* infection is suspected, you will be asked to give a stool

(faeces) sample that will be tested for the bacteria and/or its toxins. Most importantly, you and your visitors should pay particular attention to good handwashing and follow the instructions given to you by the health care staff.

Why are precautions needed?

Precautions are needed because surfaces like toilets and common areas that hands touch can become contaminated with the bacteria. The bacteria can survive on surfaces for a long time if they are not properly cleaned. In order to prevent spread to other patients in the hospital, it will be necessary for everyone to follow these precautions.

What are these precautions?

If necessary, you may be placed in a private room and your activities outside the room may be limited. You will need to take special care with handwashing. Ask your nurse if you have questions about how to wash your hands properly. Hands must be washed after using the toilet or bedpan, before eating and every time you leave your room. It is also very important for all staff and visitors to wash their hands when

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they come in and leave your room. Do not be shy about reminding everyone to wash. Signs may be placed in your area to remind everyone about the precautions. Staff will wear gowns and gloves if they expect to come in contact with stool, for example with some toileting type procedures. Sometimes equipment (e.g. commodes) may be left in your room specifically for your use.

Will I be treated?

Mild diarrhea can resolve as soon as the antibiotics that caused the symptoms in the first place are no longer taken. More serious diarrhea

can last longer without therapy. If you need to be treated, your doctor will order an antibiotic (usually called metronidazole or vancomycin) to be taken orally.

Can I give this to my family or friends?

Healthy people who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting this organism. Their best protection against even a small risk is to wash their hands after visiting you and follow the precautions. Other patients in the hospital are at greater risk of getting *C. difficile* infection.