



Infection Prevention & Control

Fact Sheet

C. DIFFICILE

Clostridium difficile

What is C. difficile?

C. difficile (*C.diff*) is one of the many kinds of bacteria that can be found in feces (bowel movement). *C. diff* disease happens when antibiotics kill your good bowel bacteria and allow the *C. diff* to grow. When *C. diff* grows it produces toxins (poisons). These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. *C. diff* disease is usually mild but sometimes can be severe. In severe cases, surgery may be needed, and in extreme cases *C. diff* may cause death.



C. diff is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospitals or long-term care homes.

What are the symptoms of C. difficile?

The usual symptoms are watery diarrhea, fever and abdominal pain.

Who is at risk for C. difficile?

- anyone taking antibiotics
- hospitalized patients, especially older patients
- persons with other bowel diseases or who have had bowel surgery
- persons on chemotherapy for cancer

How do you treat C. difficile?

The diarrhea is treated with a special antibiotic that kills the *C. difficile* bacteria.

How is C. difficile spread?

In hospitals and health-care facilities it is spread from one person to another, usually on the hands of caregivers or after contact with a contaminated object like toilets and bedpans. *C. difficile* can survive on surfaces for a long time if they are not properly cleaned.

What Special Precautions are required for C. difficile?

It is important that precautions are taken to stop it from spreading to other patients in the hospital or residents in care homes. These include:

- Single room accommodation if possible (the door can remain open)
- Gloves and gown must be worn by everyone who cares for you. .
- A sign outside your door to remind others who enter your room about the need for special precautions
- Equipment used in your daily care will remain in the room
- Everyone who leaves your room including family and friends must clean their hands well.
- You must clean your hands before you leave the room.

What precautions should I take at home?

If you have diarrhea, a separate toilet is preferred but not essential. The important thing to remember is that toilets and bathrooms should be kept clean and hands need to be washed well.

- Continue with your usual activities if you feel well enough.
- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should wash their hands after assisting with you.
- Wash your hands after you go to the bathroom, after handling soiled laundry and before preparing food or eating food.
- Maintain excellent personal hygiene through regular bathing/showers and **always use your own towel and soap**. The bathtub should be cleaned and disinfected with a household cleaner.
- Regular household cleaning using good friction are important to effectively remove *C. difficile* from surfaces.
- Use a regular household cleaner or diluted household bleach to kill germs. Remember to allow the disinfectant to air dry on the cleaned surface and to wear housekeeping gloves when using these chemicals.
- Dishes and cutlery should be washed with normal household dishwashing products.
- Although soiled linen may carry many germs, the risk of infection is low if the diarrhea on the sheets or clothing is disposed of first in the toilet and then washed separately from other household laundry.
- Regular clothing may be cleaned using the regular wash cycle. Dry items in the dryer if possible.

Can I give this to my family or friends?

Healthy people who are not taking antibiotics are not likely to catch this germ if they wash their hands well.

Relapses can occur. If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor. You should not use any drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium).

**Remember,
good hand
hygiene is the
#1 way to stop
the spread of *C.
difficile***

Hand washing Protocol

- Wet hands under warm running water.
- Apply soap and rub together for at least 15 seconds, washing well between the fingers and around nails.
- Rinse well with warm running water.
- Dry with hand towel or paper towel.
- Turn the tap off using paper towel or hand towel (remember...your hands were dirty when you turned the tap on).
- Throw the paper towel in the trash. If you are using a hand towel, do not share it with other people and wash it often.

Hand sanitizers are not effective against *C. difficile*.

