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**Clostridioides
Difficile**



Patient information

Clostridioides difficile

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Clostridioides Difficile

This leaflet is for people in hospital who have been diagnosed as having infection (formerly known as Clostridium difficile). Not all diarrhoea in hospital means that people have a Clostridioides. The main symptom of a Difficile infection is diarrhoea. Anyone in hospital experiencing diarrhoea should inform a doctor or nurse immediately.

What is Clostridioides Difficile (C.difficile)?

It is a bacterium (germ) which less than 5% of the population carry in their gut without becoming ill. It is normally kept under control by the 'good' bacteria in the gut. However, when the good bacteria are reduced, e.g. by taking antibiotics, C. difficile can multiply and produce toxins (poisons) which can cause diarrhoea. The C. difficile bacteria form spores (germs that have a protective coating). These spores are shed in the diarrhoea of an infected person and can survive for a long time in the environment. C. difficile is highly infectious and can be spread from patient to patient unless strict hygiene measures are followed.

How do you catch it?

C. difficile infection occurs when **spores enter the body through the mouth and are swallowed**. Spores from the environment can be spread to patients in many ways, such as from the hands of healthcare workers, or by patients and visitors who have touched a contaminated surface such as furniture, medical equipment, toilets, handles, sinks and taps. Some people may be carriers of C. difficile, and the source of their infection will be C. difficile living in their gut. **Alcohol hand gels are not effective against C. difficile spores. It is important that spores are removed from the hands by thoroughly washing with liquid soap and water then thoroughly drying hands using a paper towel.**

Who is most at risk of getting C. difficile?

People are more at risk of developing C. difficile infection if they:

- are over 65
- are taking, or have recently finished taking, antibiotics or any other medication that may alter the normal bacteria in the gut
- have a reduced resistance to infection generally
- have spent a long time in hospital or other type of healthcare setting such as a nursing home
- have a serious underlying illness
- have had bowel surgery.

What are the symptoms of C. difficile?

The main symptom is explosive diarrhoea, which has a particularly unpleasant smell and may contain mucous or blood. Other symptoms may include stomach cramps, fever, nausea and loss of appetite.

Loss of fluids may lead to dehydration, and regular fluid intake will be necessary. Symptoms may last from a few days to several weeks. In most people, symptoms diminish and then they recover fully. However, some patients may become seriously ill and develop inflammation of the bowel (colitis). If the colitis is severe, it can be life threatening.

How is C. difficile diagnosed?

It is difficult to diagnose C. difficile infection by the symptoms alone. Therefore, a sample of diarrhoea is taken and sent to a laboratory and tested for the presence of the C. difficile toxin. You can normally expect the result to be available within 48 hours.

How will C. difficile affect my stay in hospital?

You will be nursed in a single room or moved to another ward with other patients who have the same infection. Staff, patients and visitors will need to ensure that they always comply with the strict clinical care rules (including when moving through the hospital) until the diarrhoea has stopped and you are discharged or returned to a regular ward. It is very important to maintain good personal hygiene. Once you have stopped having diarrhoea and have had formed stools for 48–72 hours, you are not considered infectious and can go back to a main ward, although you will be expected to finish your treatment for the C. difficile infection. It is important to inform staff immediately if you have any further episodes of diarrhoea.

Being in isolation while unwell can be a difficult time. Your dignity is very important, and you must not feel embarrassed to ask for help with personal care. The staff should check on your condition regularly. Please do not hesitate to ask the staff if you do not understand what is happening. The staff are there to help and care for you and answer any questions that you or your relatives may have. If you have any concerns, speak to the nurse in charge. Alternatively, you can contact the Infection Control Department.

What precautions must staff and visitors take?

Hospital staff will take special infection control precautions, such as wearing disposable aprons and gloves.

C. difficile spores are difficult to remove from the environment, and special cleaning measures will be carried out. Staff, patients and visitors should be thorough in their hand washing with soap and water every time they deliver treatment or visit. Alcohol hand gel is not effective against C. difficile – soap and water must be used. People should not be afraid to check with staff or visitors if they have washed their hands.

How is C. difficile treated?

The doctor will assess the treatment options and decide which is the most appropriate. C. difficile infection can be treated with specific antibiotics. Examples of these are metronidazole and vancomycin, which are usually taken orally for 10–14 days. You may need to be given fluids intravenously if you become dehydrated. Milder cases may not need any treatment although your doctor may decide to stop any antibiotic that you were previously on. Your condition will be monitored closely, and it is important to inform staff if you feel your symptoms are not improving or are becoming worse.

Can people with C. difficile have visitors?

Healthy people are unlikely to develop a C. difficile infection, but precautions must still be taken to prevent its spread. In addition to respecting the general visiting rules, visitors must wash their hands with soap and water before and after contact with you and your immediate environment.

Disposable gloves and aprons should be worn if they are helping you with personal care. People in the high-risk categories, eg recent antibiotic use (see point 3), should be aware of the risks before deciding whether to visit. If they are visiting other patients in the hospital, it is best if they see you last.

Can people with C. difficile still send their washing home?

It is best to ask the staff to provide you with hospital nightwear while you are infectious. But if you have any clothing that needs to be taken home to be washed, make sure that these items are washed separately from your normal load and at 60°C. Take care not to overload the machine so that the water can circulate freely, as this will help to rinse away the germs. Some hospitals will provide special bags that can be put straight into your washing machine. If these are not available, disposable gloves should be worn when handling soiled items.

Can C. difficile come back?

There is a chance that the infection and associated symptoms may return up to three months following treatment. Contact your GP immediately if you develop diarrhoea after you are discharged from hospital. Your discharge notes will state that you had a C. difficile infection but make sure that you mention it to the doctor as well. It is important not to take any medicines to stop the diarrhoea (anti-diarrhoeal) while you are suffering from C. difficile. If you have had C. difficile, you should be given information when you leave hospital about what to do if you think the C. difficile has returned, but if you are not offered this information, please ask for it. This leaflet has been produced collaboratively between the Department of Health and C-diff Support.

For more information, speak to the ward staff, or ask for Infection control nurse.

For reference: www.dh.gov.uk/ www.clean-safe-care.nhs.uk/ www.cdifff-support.co.uk/

How to contact us

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Email: westherts.infectionpreventionandcontrol@nhs.net

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PALS

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Language



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If you are unhappy with your experience or would like to give feedback, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). PALS is available to patients, relatives, carers and friends to raise concerns.

For more information, please scan the QR code or visit our [website](#).

Survey - Friends and Family Test

We welcome feedback about your care, this feedback is shared with all staff we can improve patients' experience. Click this [link](#) or use the QR code with your smartphone.



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