

Information for patients and carers

Clostridioides Difficile

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue color, transitioning from a lighter blue at the top to a darker blue at the bottom.

What is Clostridioides Difficile?

Clostridioides difficile is sometimes known as C. difficile. It is a bacterium (germ), which is present as one of the 'normal' bacteria in the gut of some adults and children.

C. difficile does not cause any problems in healthy people.

Symptoms of C. difficile infection

Symptoms of C. difficile infection usually develop when you are taking antibiotics, or when you have finished taking them within the last few weeks.

The most common symptoms are:

- diarrhoea several times a day
- fever
- loss of appetite
- feeling sick
- tummy pain

In some cases, you may have signs of dehydration.

How do you get C. difficile?

C. difficile bacteria are found in the digestive system of about 1 in every 30 healthy adults. The bacteria often live harmlessly because other bacteria normally found in the bowel keep it under control.

But some antibiotics can interfere with the balance of bacteria in the bowel, which can cause the C. difficile bacteria to multiply and produce toxins that make the person ill. When this happens, C. difficile can spread easily to other people because the bacteria are passed out of the body in the person's diarrhoea. Once out of the body, the bacteria turn into resistant cells called spores. These can survive for long periods on hands, surfaces (such as toilets), objects and clothing unless they're thoroughly cleaned, and can infect someone else if they get into their mouth.

Someone with a *C. difficile* infection is generally considered to be infectious until at least 48 hours after their symptoms have cleared up.

C. difficile and antibiotics?

Some types of antibiotics kill the normal healthy germs and interfere with the balance of 'good' bacteria in the gut. This then allows *C. difficile* to increase in numbers and start to produce toxins, which can cause diarrhoea, stomach cramps and sometimes a fever. At this point, a person is said to be infected with *C. difficile*.

How is *C. difficile* treated?

Your GP will advise if you need hospital treatment (if you are not already in hospital). If the infection is mild, you should be able to recover at home.

If you are in hospital, you might be moved to a room of your own during treatment to reduce the risk of the infection spreading to others.

Treatment for *C. difficile* can include:

- stopping the antibiotics thought to be causing the infection, if possible – in mild cases, this may be the only treatment that is needed
- taking a 10-to-14-day course of antibiotics that are known to kill *C. difficile* bacteria
- rarely, serious infections may require surgery to remove a damaged section of the bowel

C. difficile infections usually respond well to treatment, with most people making a full recovery in a week or two.

In around 1 in 5 cases the symptoms can come back, and treatment may need to be repeated.

Treatments to avoid

Anti-motility drugs such as Loperamide should not be used if *C. difficile* infection is confirmed or suspected. This is because they may slow down the rate at which the toxins produced by the bacteria are cleared from your gut.

What are we doing to prevent the spread of *C. difficile* in hospital?

When being treated in hospital with confirmed or suspected infection patients will be nursed individually in a side room. This is to prevent it spreading to others. Also washing hands with soap and water, followed by thorough drying, after using the toilet and before meals will reduce the spread of infection. Alcohol based hand gel is not effective against *C. difficile*.

- Health care workers will be wearing gloves and aprons
- Enhanced cleaning of the environment using a cleaning product containing chlorine
- If the staff caring for you have not washed their hands, please remind them to do so

What should I do if I get diarrhoea again when I go home?

If your diarrhoea returns, you should contact your GP as soon as possible and tell him that you have had *C. difficile* and that your symptoms have returned.

Can I still have visitors?

Yes, including children and pregnant women. Your visitors must wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after visiting you.

C. difficile carriage

What does it mean if I am a “carrier” of C. difficile?

Being a carrier of C. difficile means that the germ is present in your gut but is not causing you any problems

If I’m a “carrier,” does this mean that I will become ill?

No, not necessarily.

If I am carrying C. difficile, am I a risk to others?

If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and are carrying C. difficile in your gut, the germs can contaminate the hospital environment. For this reason, if you develop diarrhoea in hospital, you will be looked after in a single room.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact
Infection Prevention & Control Team - Telephone: 01772 523785

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/c-difficile/>

Further information about *Clostridium difficile* can be found at:

[Updated guidance on the management and treatment of Clostridium difficile infection \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)

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