

Clostridium Difficile (C. diff)

Important Information for Patients and Visitors

What is it and what does it cause?

Clostridium difficile is a germ that can cause diarrhea and more serious gut conditions like colitis, which means an inflammation of the bowel. *C. difficile* infection may occur when antibiotics are used to treat other infections. When the antibiotics disrupt the normal germs in the gut, the *C. difficile* bacteria may have a chance to thrive and release toxins which can lead to inflammation and diarrhea.

Symptoms include:

- Watery diarrhea (at least three bowel movements per day for two or more days)
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain/tenderness

Who gets C. diff?

- The major risk factors are exposure to antibiotics, advanced age, hospitalization, and a weak immune system.
- People who are in good health and not on antibiotics generally do not get *C. difficile* disease but it can happen.

How is *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff) spread?

- *C. difficile* is found in bowel movements of people who are infected. People become infected when they touch equipment or surfaces that are contaminated with stool and then touch their mouth and swallow the germ.
- *C. difficile* can also be spread when the germ is on the hands of the patient or the health care worker.
- When the germ is swallowed it is not killed by the stomach acid.

How is *Clostridium difficile* (C. diff) diagnosed?

- Your health care provider will collect a sample of your stool and send it to the laboratory to check for the presence of the *C. difficile* bacteria or its toxin.

How do we prevent the spread of C. diff?

- We can prevent it by using isolation precautions. You will be placed in a private room or occasionally in a room with another patient who has *C. difficile*.
- A sign will be placed outside your room that says "Contact Precautions".
- Health care workers will clean their hands and wear gloves and gowns when entering your room and carefully remove upon exiting.
- Clean your hands, especially after using the restroom or before eating.
- When treatment for *C. difficile* is done and diarrhea or other symptoms have ended, "Contact Precautions" will be discontinued.

How do you get rid of it?

- *C. difficile* is generally treated for 10-14 days with antibiotics.
- Thorough cleaning of surfaces, equipment and devices is necessary to get rid of the germs.

What about family and visitors?

- Families, visitors and patients are partners in preventing the spread of *C. difficile*.
- Visitors should clean their hands before and after they visit.
- Visitors should wear gown and gloves to enter and carefully discard when exiting.
- They should not visit or have contact with other patients while in the hospital.

Everyday tips for when you go home:

- Clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens, and other areas on a regular basis with household detergent/disinfectants such as Lysol or a solution of bleach.
- Wash your hands well before eating or preparing food.
- Do not share dishes, utensils or food with any one.
- Clothing, bed linens and towels should be washed separately in hot water with detergent and dried using the "hot" setting on the dryer.

**If you have questions or concerns please contact:
Infection Prevention - 585-275-7716**

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