

Infection Control

Clostridioides difficile

Infection

Information for patients



Clostridioides difficile (C.diff) is a bacterium (germ) that may be present in the gut of some people.

In response to a trigger, usually antibiotics, the C.diff bacteria can multiply and damage the lining of the gut due to a toxin release, which can cause diarrhoea and abdominal discomfort.

Who is at risk?

- Hospital in-patients, especially those aged over 65 years.
- People who have had antibiotics recently.
- People known to have stomach/bowel problems or conditions.

How will I know if I've got C.diff?

If you are experiencing diarrhoea and we are not sure of the cause, a sample of poo will be sent to the laboratory for testing and the results should be available within a couple of days. The ward team will let you know your results as soon as possible.

What caused me to get C.diff?

C.diff may have been in your gut before you came into hospital or it is possible you may have picked it up while in hospital.

C.diff is mainly spread through person to person contact. The bacteria forms spores which can survive in the environment for long periods of time. This means that C.diff can be picked up on people's hands and can be transferred into the gut via the mouth.

What will happen to me?

You will be asked to move to a side room for your care and remain there for the rest of your hospital stay. You will have your own toilet or commode to reduce the risk of spreading C.diff to other patients. You may be moved to a special unit in the hospital if this is decided to be the best thing for your care.

Some patients with C.diff are asked if they would like to take part in a research study designed to improve treatment and outcomes for patients. A research nurse may visit you to discuss this.

If you receive any healthcare treatment or you are readmitted to hospital you should mention that you have had C diff infection.

Is there any treatment?

Yes, your doctor will decide what treatment you need and will prescribe this for you and the treatment can last between 10-14 days. It is extremely important to finish the course of treatment in order for it to be effective. Please remember it is important to drink plenty of fluids to replace those fluids lost due to diarrhoea.

How long will the symptoms continue?

This can vary from person to person, but on average symptoms last between 7-10 days.

Will it affect my visitors?

C.diff is not a problem to healthy people.

Visitors should always wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water:

- before they enter your room
- before they leave your room
- after they leave your room.

Alcohol hand gel does not get rid of C.diff spores so the use of soap and water is essential.

If your visitors are visiting others in the hospital they should try and visit you last. Visitors should also not have contact with other patients in the ward during their visit in order to reduce the chance of the infection being spread to others.

Can I still go home if I have C.diff?

As soon as your doctor says you are well enough, you can go home. Having had a C.diff infection should not stop this.

What will happen when I get home?

Not all precautions taken in hospital are necessary when you go home. It is advisable to continue to wash your hands before preparing and eating food, after using the toilet and after handling soiled linen or clothes.

Any soiled items should be laundered at the highest temperature recommended on the care label. The hospital will send a letter to your GP on your discharge informing them of the infection and the treatment you received. There is a possibility that the infection may reoccur, especially in the first few weeks following treatment. If your symptoms do return you should contact your GP.

Please ask one of the doctors or nurses if you have further questions.