

PERTH AND SMITHS FALLS DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Patient Information Sheet C. difficile (Clostridium difficile)

What is Clostridium Difficile (C.difficile or C.diff)?

C.diff is one of the many types of bacteria that can be found in feces (bowel movement).

What is Clostridium difficile infection (CDI)?

For most people, *C. difficile* does not pose a health risk. When *C. difficile* bacteria grow in the bowel, it produces toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea, causing a disease known as Clostridium difficile- associated Disease (CDI). The effects of CDI are usually mild but sometimes can be more severe. Symptoms can range from mild or severe diarrhea to high fever, abdominal cramping, abdominal pain and dehydration. In severe cases, surgery may be needed, and in extreme cases CDI may cause death.

What causes Clostridium difficile infection (CDI)?

C. difficile associated disease (CDI) can sometimes occur when antibiotics are prescribed. Antibiotics work by killing off bacteria – the bad bacteria – but also good bacteria. Without the presence of the typical “good” bowel bacteria, the *C. difficile* bacteria may start to grow and produce toxins that can cause CDI.

The main symptoms of C.diff infection are:

- Watery diarrhea
- Fever
- Abdominal pain or tenderness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea

Who Gets C.diff?

For healthy people, *C. difficile* does not pose a health risk. Those at higher risk include hospitalized patients, recent bowel surgery, the elderly, people with severe underlying illness, and people taking certain antibiotics (especially over a prolonged period of time) or cancer chemotherapy. In addition, patients taking stomach ulcer drugs, known as proton pump inhibitors, are at increased risk for contracting *C. difficile* infection.

How Will Your Doctor Know That You Have C.diff?

If you have symptoms of *C.diff*, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if *C.diff* is present.

How is C.diff Treated?

For people with mild symptoms, no treatment may be required. For more severe cases, medication and sometimes surgery may be necessary. There are also new treatments, such as fecal transplantation, currently being studied for treating persistent *C. difficile* infection

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How Does C.diff Spread?

When a person has C.diff infection, the bacteria and spores in the stool can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans or commode chairs. When touching these items our hands can become contaminated. If we then touch our mouth without washing our hands, we can become infected. Our soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces. By always washing your hands and practicing good hygiene, you can greatly reduce your chances of picking up **any** bacteria – not just C. difficile.

How to Prevent the Spread of C.diff?

If you are in the hospital and have C.diff diarrhea you will be put on precautions until you are free from diarrhea for at least 2 days. Your activities outside the room may be restricted. Health care staff who enter your room must wear a gown and gloves.

Everyone **MUST** clean their hands when leaving your room.

Always wash your hands after the bathroom. Cleaning hands is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of C.diff. As well, a thorough cleaning of your room and equipment will be done to prevent spread of the infection.

What Should I Do at Home?

Healthy people like your family and friends who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting CDI.

Hand Hygiene

Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds with soap and water:

- After using the toilet
- After touching dirty surfaces
- Before eating
- Before preparing meals

Cleaning the house

Use an all-purpose household cleaner. Follow the directions on the label, and:

- Wet the surface well and clean using good friction
- Allow the surface to air dry
- Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with feces such as the toilet and sink. Remove any visible feces, and then clean as described above

Cleaning clothes/other fabrics

Wash clothes /fabrics separately if they are heavily soiled with feces:

- Rinse off feces
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- Dry items in a dryer on high heat, if possible
- Dry clean where appropriate

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Cleaning dishes

Regular cleaning - use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water.

It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should **not** use any anti-diarrheal drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium). If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor.

References:

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca> ; 2015-12-23

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca> ; 2014-05-02

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