

PERTH AND SMITHS FALLS DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Patient Information Sheet C. difficile (Clostridium difficile)

What is Clostridium difficile (C. difficile)?

Clostridium difficile (C. difficile) is a bacterium that causes mild to severe diarrhea and intestinal conditions like pseudomembranous colitis (inflammation of the colon).

Most cases of C. difficile occur in patients who are taking certain antibiotics in high doses or over a prolonged period of time. Some antibiotics can destroy a person's normal bacteria found in the gut, causing C. difficile bacteria to grow. When this occurs, the C. difficile bacteria produce toxins, which can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea. However, some people can have C. difficile bacteria present in their bowel and not show symptoms.

How do people get C. difficile?

C. difficile bacteria and their spores are found in feces. People can get infected if they touch surfaces contaminated with feces, and then touch their mouth.

For healthy people, C. difficile does not pose a health risk. The elderly and those with other illnesses or who are taking antibiotics are at a greater risk of infection.

How does using antibiotics contribute to the development of C. difficile?

Certain antibiotics used in high doses or over a prolonged period of time will increase the chance of developing a C. difficile infection. Antibiotics alter the normal levels of bacteria found in the gut. When there are fewer bacteria in our gut, C. difficile bacteria have the chance to thrive and produce toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea.

What are the symptoms of C. difficile?

Symptoms include watery diarrhea, fever, and loss of appetite, nausea, and abdominal pain/tenderness.

What can be done to prevent the spread of C. difficile?

As with any infectious disease, frequent hand hygiene is the most effective way of preventing the transmission of healthcare associated infections. Hand washing with soap and water is important during C. difficile outbreaks and is one of the best defences against further spread of the bacteria.

If you do not have access to soap and water, frequent use of alcohol-based hand rubs is encouraged. Most healthcare facilities provide alcohol-based hand rubs at entrances. Be sure to use them, but be aware that they are less effective than washing with soap and water as they do not destroy C. difficile spores.

When antibiotics are prescribed, follow your doctor, pharmacist, or healthcare provider's instructions and the directions on the label. Keep taking the antibiotics as prescribed to kill all of the C. difficile bacteria.

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If you have concerns about C. difficile and medication you are currently using, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or healthcare provider.

At home

Wash your hands with soap and water every time you use the bathroom and always before you eat or preparing meals. Remind relatives and friends taking care of you to do the same.

Try to use a separate bathroom if you have diarrhea. If you can't, be sure the bathroom is well cleaned before others use it.

Take showers and wash with soap to remove any C. diff germs you could be carrying on your body.

How do I kill C. diff germs at home?

Finding C. diff germs in the home is not unusual, even when no one in the home has been ill with C. diff. Most healthy adults who come in contact with C. diff in the home won't get sick.

Hospitals use special cleaning products to kill C. diff, but you can make a cleaner at home. Mix 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.

Surfaces

Use 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.

Wet surfaces well and clean using good friction and allow the surface to air dry. Focus on regularly cleaning items that are touched by hands. These include but are not limited to:

- Doorknobs
- Electronics (be careful because bleach can damage many electronics and plastics) refrigerator handles
- Shared cups
- Toilet flushers and toilet seats

Laundry

If someone in your house has C. diff, wash items they touch before others use them. These include but are not limited to:

- bed linens
- towels
- household linens
- clothing, especially underwear

If these items have visible poop, rinse them well before washing.

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Then launder in a washer and dryer, using the hottest water that is safe for those items. Use chlorine bleach if the items can be safely washed with it.

Consider wearing gloves when handling dirty laundry and always wash your hands with soap and water after, even if you use gloves.

It's OK to take clothes to a dry cleaner that was worn by a patient infected with C. diff. However, dry cleaning isn't as effective as other methods at killing the spores. Therefore, this option should be used only for clothes that can't be machine-washed.

References:

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

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

[C. difficile \(Clostridium difficile\) - Canada.ca](http://www.cdc.gov/cdiff/prevent.html)

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