



Learning about *Clostridium Difficile* Infection in the Hospital

What is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*)?

- *C. difficile* is a germ (bacteria) that lives in the large bowel of some people. This germ can cause inflammation of the intestine and diarrhea.

How does it spread?

- *C. difficile* can live on hard surfaces (e.g., countertops, toilets, equipment) for up to several months.
- It can be spread from person to person on hands and equipment that isn't properly cleaned between uses. This can happen in the community or in healthcare settings; you likely won't know where you came into contact with *C. difficile*.

What do *colonization* and *infection* mean?

- *Colonization* – This is when the germ is found on your body but it doesn't make you sick. Some people normally have *C. difficile* in their body. In this case, it's no more dangerous than any of the other germs we live with. People who are colonized with *C. difficile* are sometimes called carriers.
- *Infection* – Infection is what happens when a germ makes you sick. Some people may be at more risk for infection. Symptoms may include diarrhea, stomach cramps, and fever. As with any other type of infection, some infections can become serious.

Who is most at risk to develop *C. difficile* infection?

Most at risk are older adults and people:

- with lowered immune systems
- who had a gastrointestinal illness or surgery
- who are or have been taking antibiotics

How is it treated?

- People who are *carriers* aren't usually treated with antibiotics.
- People infected with *C. difficile* may be given antibiotics. It's very important to finish the prescription for antibiotics, even if you're feeling better.

What do I do if I have or have had *C. difficile*?

- Let the staff know you have or have had *C. difficile*.
 - A sign will be put on your door reminding people to use extra precautions.
 - Caregivers will wear a gown over their clothes and wear gloves.

What can I do to decrease the spread of *C. difficile*?

- Clean your hands regularly with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 70% alcohol in it if soap and water isn't available. Soap and water are the first choice. Alcohol-based hand rubs aren't as effective for illnesses that cause diarrhea. Always clean your hands:
 - before preparing food and eating
 - after using the bathroom
 - after helping others with toileting
- Help those who can't wash their hands well on their own.
- Use antibiotics wisely. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria develop because antibiotics aren't used or taken properly.
 - *Antibiotics only work for bacterial infections.* They don't help for colds, the flu, or other viral infections.
 - *Take all your antibiotics, even if you feel better.* If you don't finish them, it may not cure your infection.
 - *Don't use other people's antibiotics.* Different antibiotics are meant for different types of bacteria. Using the wrong one helps the germ become resistant to the antibiotic.
- Keep bathroom surfaces clean.
- Don't share personal items (e.g., towels, clothing, bedding, bar soap, razors, or sports equipment).
- Wash clothing using regular laundry soap in the regular wash cycle.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information call Health Link at 8-1-1.

This content may be updated without notice.

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