



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Clostridium difficile Infection Patient Information

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile (also known as *C. difficile* or *C. diff*) is one of the many germs (bacteria) sometimes found in the large bowel.

How do people get *C. difficile*?

C. diff germs and the spores they produce are present in diarrhea of a person with a *C. diff* infection. Others can become infected if they touch a surface (toilet, bedpan, bed railing, etc.) with *C. diff* on it, and then touch their mouths. Healthcare providers can also spread this germ if they don't clean their hands prior to caring for their patients.

How does *C. difficile* make people sick?

Although antibiotics can be lifesaving medications, they can also destroy the good germs in a person's intestines. If *C. diff* is present, it will grow to unusually high levels in the intestines and develop toxins. These toxins can damage the intestines and may cause diarrhea. Infection with *C. diff* is usually mild but sometimes can be severe. *C. diff* doesn't usually make healthy people sick, whereas elderly people taking antibiotics are at the great risk of severe illness.

What are the symptoms of an infection with *C. difficile*?

Symptoms include diarrhea (mild or severe), fever, loss of appetite, nausea, belly pain and tenderness.

Can infections with *C. difficile* be treated?

Treatment depends on how sick a person is with an infection caused by *C. diff*. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe infections, special antibiotics are given.

What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of the *C. difficile* germ?

Hand washing is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of this germ and other germs. Be sure to clean your hands before eating and after using the toilet. Patient safety is very important. Our goal is to always identify patients with *C. diff* infections and institute infection control measures quickly. If you develop diarrhea you may be moved to a

private room, and your healthcare provider will care for you wearing gloves and a gown until you are free of diarrhea for at least 2 days. Your room will be cleaned twice a day with a special cleaner that is stronger than our normal hospital cleaners. During the time you have diarrhea, you will be asked to stay in your room; however, you may still have visitors. We will ask your visitors to clean their hands when they enter and leave your room. Visitors and everyone entering your room to provide care will need to wear a gown and gloves. Please remind visitors not to use your bathroom.

What do I need to do for *C. difficile* at home?

Generally speaking, people in the hospital are sicker and more prone to infections than people in the community. At home, precautions do not need to be as strict. However, certain steps can help reduce the risk of spreading this germ to family members and other visitors.

Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds after using the toilet, before eating or before preparing food. Caregivers should wash their hands after providing care. Gloves should be used to handle body fluids or dirty items. Discard disposable gloves in the regular garbage or clean rubber gloves after use.

No special precautions are required to clean your home. This germ can be destroyed by most household cleaning products or diluted household bleach (one part bleach to 10 parts water freshly diluted each time). Wet a clean cloth thoroughly with the cleaning product. Wipe surfaces starting from the cleanest area and moving towards the dirtiest area using good friction, and paying special attention to areas such as the toilet and bathroom sink. Let the surfaces air dry. This will allow enough time with the cleaning product to contact and kill the bacteria.

What do I need to know prior to discharge?

Your healthcare provider will review good hygiene practices with you before you go home. **It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your Doctor.** You should not use any drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium). **If diarrhea continues or comes back, contact your Family Doctor.**

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777.