

## Information leaflet for patients affected by *Clostridioides difficile* infection

### What is *Clostridioides difficile*?

*Clostridioides difficile* is sometimes called *C. difficile* or *C. diff* for short. It is a germ that lives naturally in the gut. It can be found in healthy people (up to 3% of adults and 66% of babies) where it causes no symptoms.

### How do you get *C. diff* infection?

*C. diff* is normally kept under control by the good bacteria in your gut and this protects you against *C. diff* infection. If you are taking antibiotics to treat another infection the balance of bacteria in the gut can change and sometimes the *C. diff* can rapidly grow and produce toxins. These toxins can inflame the bowel and cause diarrhoea. This can start a *C. diff* infection.

### Who gets *C. diff* infection?

You are more likely to get a *C. diff* infection if:

- You are over 65 years.
- You have been taking antibiotics.
- You have had recent stays in hospital.
- Your immune system isn't working properly.
- You have had a *C. diff* infection in the past.
- You have had medical procedures or operations to your bowel.

### How do I know if I have *C. diff*?

*C. diff* can cause diarrhoea, high temperature, stomach pains and feeling sick. If a doctor thinks you have *C. diff* they will ask for a sample of your faeces to be tested. The results are usually back in a few hours. Occasionally people may experience severe inflammation of the bowel.

### How is *C. diff* treated?

If you are taking antibiotics these may be stopped and your symptoms may subside without any further treatment. Symptoms usually last for 7-10 days and mild infection can clear up on its own.

In more severe cases the symptoms can last longer, and you might be given an antibiotic to treat the *C. diff* infection. You will also be asked to drink plenty of water to make sure you don't get dehydrated.

### How is *C. diff* spread?

The *C. diff* spores are passed out in the faeces of people who are infected. These spores can survive for long periods on hands and in the environment, for example on floors, furniture, beds, buzzers and around toilets. You can pick up the infection by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your mouth or eating.

- It can also be spread through direct contact with someone who is infected. We consider someone with C. diff to be free of infection when they have had no symptoms for 72 hours and have had a normal bowel action.

### How can the spread of C. diff be prevented?

If you have symptoms of diarrhoea in hospital you may be moved to a single room with your own toilet. Staff will wear disposable gloves and aprons when caring for you. They will wash their hands with liquid soap and water before and after wearing gloves and aprons.

Your bedside area should be kept clutter free to ensure it can be cleaned. Your room and bathroom will be cleaned with a chlorine-based disinfectant.

You should wash your hands regularly with soap and water, especially before eating and drinking and after using the toilet. Visitors will need to wear gloves and aprons when entering your room and will need to wash their hands well before and after they see you with liquid soap and water. Alcohol hand gels are not effective against C.diff.

### Can I still go home?

You will be allowed home when you are medically fit. If you are still taking prescribed treatment for C. diff you will need to complete the course. Your GP will be told about your C. diff infection.

If your diarrhoea continues at home:

- Wash hands with liquid soap and running water.
- Any soiled items of clothing should be washed separately at the highest possible temperature.
- Maintain a good diet and fluid intake.
- Do not share towels or flannels.
- Use a bleach-based cleaning product in your bathroom and toilet after cleaning with your usual cleaning products.

It may take a couple of weeks for your C. diff infection to clear up properly. If your symptoms return or become worse, you will need to let your doctor know.

### References

Clostridioides Difficile, NHS, 2022 - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/c-difficile/>

Clostridioides difficile: guidance, data and analysis - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) 2022

[Diarrhoea - antibiotic associated | Health topics A to Z | CKS | NICE](#) 2023



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