

What is *C. difficile*?

Clostridium difficile, also known as “*C. difficile*” or “*C. diff*”, is a germ (bacteria) that can cause diarrhea.

What is a *C. difficile* infection?

A *C. diff* infection is when the bacteria grows in your bowels (gut) and makes you feel sick. If you have a *C. diff* infection, you may also experience:

- Watery diarrhea
- Belly pain and tenderness, cramping
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Loss of body fluid (dehydration)

Who can get a *C. difficile* infection?

Anyone can get a *C. diff* infection.

It most often occurs in people who are taking antibiotics. People are also more likely to get a *C. diff* infection if they have:

- A very weak immune system
- Had recent bowel disease or surgery
- Had chemotherapy (treatment for cancer)
- Been in the hospital for a long time

How is a *C. difficile* infection treated?

To diagnose a *C. diff* infection, a sample of your diarrhea is collected. This sample is then tested for *C. diff*.

If the test is positive, your doctor will discuss with you the best course of treatment. One of these treatments may be antibiotics. Sometimes, antibiotics need to be repeated to get rid of the infection.

In very serious cases, surgery may be needed to remove the infected part of the bowel. This is rare.

How does *C. difficile* spread?

C. diff can live in the environment on things like door knobs, taps, toilet seats, toilet handles, bed linens, bed rails, and medical equipment.

In the hospital, *C. diff* can be spread from person-to-person on contaminated equipment (equipment that has the germ on them) or on the hands of healthcare providers and visitors.

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

We are very careful when we know someone has *C. diff* and follow certain steps to protect the health and safety of you, your family, visitors, and other patients. These steps include:

- Healthcare providers washing their hands with soap and water before and after caring for every patient.
- Carefully cleaning medical equipment, hospital rooms, and surfaces.
- Putting up a sign on your hospital room door that tells healthcare providers of any special equipment they should use, like a gown over their clothes and gloves.

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

Patients and families are partners in patient safety and the quality of patient care. Here are the 5 things you can do to stop the spread of C. difficile to you and your family:



Wash your hands with soap and water often.



Ask your healthcare providers, family members, and other visitors to wash their hands **before** and **after** coming into your hospital room.



Stay in the hospital room as much as possible.

- You, your family and visitors should stay away from common patient areas, such as patient kitchens.



Ask your nurse to show you the steps for using disposable bedpans or urinals.



Take your antibiotics exactly as prescribed by your doctor.

- Do not take half-doses (**amounts**) or stop before you are finished all the antibiotic pills.

What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

Once you go home, it is important that you continue to wash your hands with soap and water often, especially:

- Before preparing or eating food.
- After using the bathroom or changing a diaper.
- After cleaning toilets, sinks, and taps.

People who live with you should also wash their hands as often as possible.

It is also recommended that you:

- Do not share personal care items, such as toothbrushes, bar soap, and towels.
- Clean bathrooms and other frequently touched surfaces regularly (e.g. daily).
- Wash cleaning cloths after each use. Do not reuse them to clean other surfaces.

If you develop more diarrhea or belly pain, tell your doctor immediately.

It's good to ask!

If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

Family members and visitors are not required to wear gloves or a gown over their clothes.

Developed by the health professionals of the Department of Nursing and the PHSA Infection Prevention and Control Service with assistance from the Learning & Development Department