Infection Prevention

Patient information

It’s OK to ask: Please feel free to remind your healthcare worker about cleaning their hands.

What is Clostridium Difficile?

Clostridium Difficile, often referred to as C. difficile or C. Diff, is a bacteria usually found in the intestines (bowel) in both healthy people and hospitalised patients. C.diff is a common cause of diarrhoea in patients who have received antibiotics. C.diff infection can occur when there is an imbalance in bacteria of the bowel. C.diff forms a spore around the bacteria which can then last for up to 70 days in the environment, increasing the risk of infection to others.

C.diff bacteria also release toxins if the infection worsens, and these toxins can be damaging to the lining of the bowel causing swelling and diarrhoea.

What are the symptoms of C. diff?

The onset of symptoms may occur 5 – 10 days after initial infection, or be delayed up to 10 weeks. Some people never experience symptoms at all.

Mild symptoms include:

- Diarrhoea
- Abdominal cramping
- Bloating

Severe symptoms include:

- Nausea
- Tiredness (malaise)
- Fever
- Blood and/or mucous in stools
- Rigors (shivering)

In extremely rare cases, severe infections when left untreated can lead to death, usually in the elderly, those with multiple diseases, or those who are immunocompromised.

Who is at risk of getting C.diff?

- People on long term antibiotics
- People receiving treatment for cancer
**Clostridium Difficile**
Infection Prevention

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**How is C. Diff spread?**
*C. Diff* is spread from person to person through contact with contaminated surfaces and objects. *C. Diff* can also be spread via a person’s or healthcare worker’s hands, which in turn contaminate patient’s hands, causing *C. Diff* Infections when ingested.

**How to prevent *Clostridium Difficile***
Infection Prevention and Control measures are focused on minimising the spread of the *C. Diff* bacteria within and between patients and wards. Some of the strategies are as follows.

**Cleaning**: The frequency of cleaning and disinfection of your room/ward may increase, focusing on cleaning surfaces that are frequently touched.

**Isolation**: Whilst infectious you will be cared for in a single room. Healthcare workers will put on gowns and gloves when entering your room and during your care. This is to protect them and to reduce the likelihood of spread to other patients that they are caring for.

**Hand hygiene**: It’s very important that staff, patients and visitors clean their hands every time they enter or leave a room or cubicle. To clean hands, alcohol based hand rub or soap and water can be used.

**It’s OK to ask**: Please feel free to remind your healthcare worker about cleaning their hands.

**What can you do?**
- Wash your hands after using the toilet.

**Procedures and diagnostic tests:**
Whilst you are infectious, should you need to leave your room for any procedure/tests, there may be changes in schedules to ensure that other patients are not exposed.

**What do my visitors need to do?**
Your visitors should take care to ensure that their hands are clean by using either the alcohol based hand rub or soap and water when caring for you and when leaving your room.

Your visitors may be asked to wear a gown and gloves if they are directly involved in your care. Your visitors will be shown how to apply and remove personal protective equipment by a healthcare worker.