

Clostridium difficile

What is Clostridium difficile?

- Clostridium difficile (also known as C.difficile or C.diff) is a type of bacteria which can be found in the large bowel which can cause diarrhoea and most commonly affects people who have recently been treated with antibiotics
- C.diff infections can be unpleasant and can sometimes cause serious bowel problems, but can usually be treated with another course of antibiotics

What are the symptoms of C.difficile? (You may experience one or more of these symptoms)

- watery diarrhoea, which sometimes can be bloody
- painful tummy cramps
- feeling sick
- signs of dehydration, such as a dry mouth, headaches and peeing less often than normal
- a high temperature (fever) of above 38C (100.4F)
- loss of appetite and weight loss

How do people get C.difficile infection?

- Some antibiotics may affect the normal balance of the bacteria in the bowel allowing the C.difficile bacteria to grow in large numbers which causes diarrhoea (C.difficile infection)
- C. difficile bacteria can spread easily; this is because the bacteria produces germs (spores) which leave the body in an infected person's diarrhoea
- C.difficile can be spread by people who have the infection who do not wash their hands thoroughly after visiting the toilet or after touching contaminated surfaces

Who is most at risk of C.difficile infection?

- People most at risk of C.difficile infection include:
 - ▶ people over the age of 65 years
 - ▶ anyone whose immune system is weakened
 - ▶ anyone who has recently been in hospital or who lives in a care home
 - ▶ those who have had recent antibiotic treatment

How do you know if you have C.difficile infection?

- If you have diarrhoea your GP may send a sample of your watery diarrhoea to be tested for C.difficile. Your GP will let you know the results of the test and advise on what treatment you may need

Can C.difficile infection be treated?

- If you are taking antibiotics, your treatment will be reviewed and may be stopped or a different antibiotic may be prescribed

Originator: Infection Prevention and Control

Continued overleaf...

How can you look after yourself at home?

If you're well enough to be treated at home, there are a number of things you can do to help relieve your symptoms and prevent the infection spreading:

- make sure you finish the entire course of any antibiotics you're prescribed, even if you're feeling better
- drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and eat plain foods such as soup, rice, pasta and bread if you feel hungry
- don't take anti-diarrhoeal medication, as this can stop the infection being cleared from your body

How to prevent the spread of C.difficile?

- always wash your hands thoroughly with liquid soap and warm running water especially after going to the toilet and before preparing or eating food
- after you have had diarrhoea, close the toilet seat lid before flushing to reduce the possibility of bacteria spreading
- do not share towels and flannels
- do not use alcohol hand gels as they do not kill C.difficile bacteria
- clean surfaces in toilets/bathrooms e.g. taps, toilet flush, door handles, soap dispenser, as often as possible (at least daily) using products containing bleach following cleaning with your usual cleaning product
- wash any soiled clothing and bedding as soon as possible. These should be washed separately from other laundry at the highest temperature recommended on the label
- where possible, you should stay at home until you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours

What about visitors?

- healthy people are at very little risk of getting C.difficile so it is ok for them to visit. However, if your visitors are frail or unwell they may need to wait until you are better

What if you have a healthcare appointment?

- if you are due to have an outpatient appointment, test or operation, and you have diarrhoea please ring the hospital or your GP and let them know. They will be able to give you advice on appointment arrangements
- if you are receiving care from a doctor, community nurse, or other healthcare professional, please tell them that you have tested positive for C.difficile

What to do if your symptoms return?

- sometimes people who have recently had a C.difficile infection can become ill again
- if diarrhoea returns, either during or after you have completed the course of antibiotics, it is important that you let your GP or the Out of Hours Service know as soon as possible on 111. A further course of antibiotics may be required or the ones you are currently taking may need to be changed