



Information Sheet for Patients and Visitors: Clostridium difficile

When you go home, if diarrhea continues or returns:

It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should not use any over the counter medications that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium).

If you begin to have watery diarrhea, fever and/or abdominal pain or tenderness, contact your Family Doctor or Nurse Practitioner immediately to start treatment. If you are unable to see your family doctor within the first 24 hours of the start of any of the symptoms listed, go to the Emergency Department closest to you to start treatment.

WHAT IS A C.DIFFICILE INFECTION?

Clostridium difficile (C.difficile) is a bacteria that can live normally in the large intestine. C.difficile infections occur when antibiotics kill the good bowel bacteria and allow C.difficile to grow. When C.difficile grows, it produces toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. C.difficile infections are usually mild but sometimes they can be severe. In severe cases, surgery may be needed, and in extreme cases C.difficile infections may cause death. C.difficile is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospitals or long-term care homes. If you have symptoms of a C.difficile infection, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if C.difficile toxins are present. The main symptoms of a C.difficile infection are:

- Watery diarrhea
- Fever
- Abdominal pain or tenderness

WHO GETS A C.DIFFICILE INFECTION?

C.difficile infections usually occur during or after the use of antibiotics. The elderly or those with serious illnesses and poor overall health may be at increased risk of acquiring the severe form of a C.difficile infection.

HOW IS C.DIFFICILE SPREAD?

When a person has a C.difficile infection, the bacteria in the stool can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans, or commode chairs. When touching these items our hands can become contaminated. If we then touch our mouth without washing our hands, we can become infected. Our soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces.

WHAT SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR C.DIFFICILE? WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Together we can take steps to stop the spread of C.difficile to other patients in the hospital:

- ✓ You will stay in a room by yourself until you are free from diarrhea for at least two days
- ✓ Everyone who cares for you or visits you will wear gloves and a long-sleeved gown
- ✓ A sign for “Contact Precautions” will be placed on your door to remind everyone who enters your room about the special steps
- ✓ Your room and the equipment used in you room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly
- ✓ Everyone who leaves your room will clean their hands
- ✓ You will clean your hands and wear clean clothes or clean hospital gown before you leave your room
- ✓ Always wash your hands after using the bathroom
- ✓ Your activities outside your room may be restricted

WHAT ABOUT MY FAMILY AND VISITORS?

Family and friends can still visit you in the hospital. The signs outside your room will show how to safely wear the gloves and gowns. Before leaving your room, your family and visitors must remove the gloves and gown, and dispose of them in the garbage located in your room. Then, they must clean their hands with alcohol hand rub. We ask that your family and visitors not assist other patients in your room. Instead, they can assist by using the call bell to ask for help.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AT HOME?

Healthy people like your family and friends who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting a C.difficile infection. It is important to follow these steps to prevent the spread of C.difficile:

- ✓ **Good Hand Hygiene** – Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds:
 - After using the toilet
 - After touching dirty surfaces
 - Before eating
 - Before preparing meals
- ✓ **Cleaning the house** – Use household cleaners, preferably one that contains *bleach*. Follow the directions on the label, and:
 - Wet the surface well and clean using good friction
 - Allow the surface to air dry
 - Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with feces such as the toilet and sink. Remove any visible feces, and then clean.
- ✓ **Cleaning Clothes** – Wash clothes separately if they are heavily soiled with feces:
 - Rinse off feces
 - Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
 - Dry items in the dryer on high heat, if possible
 - Dry clean where appropriate
- ✓ **Cleaning Dishes** – Use the dishwasher or clean well by hand with soap and water.

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Reference:

Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee (PIDAC) guidelines, Annex C:
Testing, Surveillance and Management of *Clostridium difficile*

Last Revised: April 2015