

Clostridioides difficile (C-diff)

What is *C.diff*?

C.diff is a bacterium that is present naturally in the gut of around two-thirds of children and 3% of adults.

C.diff does not cause any problems in healthy people. However, some antibiotics that are used to treat other health conditions can interfere with the balance of 'good' bacteria in the gut. When this happens, *C.diff* bacteria can multiply and produce toxins (poisons), which cause illness such as diarrhoea and fever. At this point, a person is said to be infected with *C.diff*.

What are the symptoms?

C.diff causes mild to moderate watery diarrhoea. Symptoms can also include abdominal pains, nausea and a high temperature and can last from a few days to several weeks.

How do you catch *C.diff*?

C.diff can be caught by coming into contact with a contaminated environment or an infected person and ingesting bacteria.

In most healthy people *C.diff* will not multiply in the gut and they will not develop disease. However, in some vulnerable people, particularly those whose gut has already been disrupted by antibiotic treatment, *C.diff* may multiply and make that person ill.

How is *C.diff* treated?

In most patients the disease can be treated with an antibiotic that can kill *C.diff* bacteria, which should ease the symptoms within two to three days.

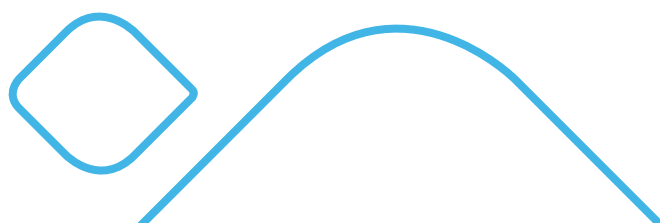
How is *C.diff* diagnosed?

Initial diagnosis is often made on the symptoms a person has and their patient medical history, for example having recently taken antibiotics. This preliminary diagnosis can help the hospital to bring in increased levels of infection control precaution, such as isolating the patient in a side room to prevent the infection from spreading. This is then followed up by looking for *C.diff* toxins in the faeces, the result of which will be available within 24 hours.

Who does *C.diff* affect?

C.diff mainly affects people who have recently taken antibiotics, particularly the elderly.

Over 80% of *C.diff* cases are reported in the over 65s. Immunocompromised patients such as people with some types of cancer or chronic disease are also at risk. Children under the age of two years are usually not affected.



If I have *C.diff*, what should I do to prevent the spread of infection to others?

C.diff is able to produce a 'spore' which is resistant to some chemicals. Hand washing with soap and water is recommended rather than using alcohol gel after contact with a patient with *C.diff* as alcohol gel will not destroy the spores.

In order to reduce the spread of infection to others make sure you wash your hands with soap and water regularly, especially after using the toilet and before eating. You should encourage your visitors to wash their hands before leaving.

Staff will place patient's own clothing, if soiled, into a dissolvable bag and this should be placed into a washing machine on a 60 degrees wash or the highest temp possible for the fabric.

How can hospitals prevent the spread of *C.diff*?

As antibiotics can sensitise patients to *C.diff* infection, clinical staff make sure they are used only when really necessary.

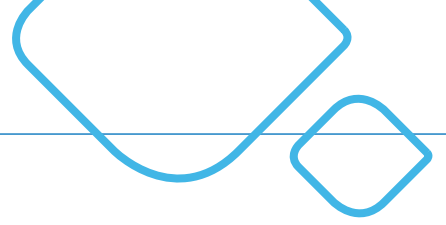
Identifying patients in the early stages of this disease and introducing infection control measures, such as placing patients in a side room, helps to limit the spread. Staff should wear disposable gloves and aprons when caring for infected patients and wash their hands after contact with a patient who has the infection. *C.diff* contamination should be removed from the environment daily by thorough cleaning using a bleach containing cleaning agent. In outbreak situations, where a number of patients are showing signs of illness, the Infection Control Team will introduce extra measures.

Are some patients at increased risk for *C.diff* disease?

Yes. Patients who have had antibiotic exposure, gastrointestinal surgery, a long length of stay in a healthcare setting, serious illness, advanced age and patients that are immunocompromised are at increased risk.

A few key points include:

- All patients should wash their hands after visiting the toilet and before eating.
- Visitors should wash hands before leaving the ward.
- Staff should wear gloves and aprons when caring for a patient with the infection and wash their hands.
- Staff must maintain high standards of cleanliness in the ward area.
- Patients with *C.diff* infections should be cared for in side rooms.
- Treatment for *C.diff* infection is through antibiotic therapy .
- Patient's own soiled laundry will be placed in a dissolvable bag and should be washed in a washing machine at 60 degrees or highest temp for fabric.



For further information, please contact:

Infection Prevention and Control 01225 825450

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath, BA1 3NG
01225 428331 | www.ruh.nhs.uk

If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.

Date of publication: October 2024 | Ref: RUH INC/009
© Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust