

***Clostridium difficile* infection**

This information is for patients, relatives and carers. It explains what *Clostridium difficile* is, how it affects us, how it spreads and what we can do to stop it spreading.

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile, also known as “*C.difficile*” and “*C.diff*”, is a type of bacterium that causes diarrhoea. Other symptoms may include fever, loss of appetite, nausea or abdominal pains.

Clostridium difficile is usually found in the large intestine (bowel). A small group of people carry a small amount of the bacteria without any problems as the `good bacteria` in the intestine keeps things in check. However, when you take antibiotics it may disrupt the amount of `good bacteria` and could cause you to develop the *Clostridium difficile* infection. A sample of loose stool is sent to the laboratory for testing to confirm if you have the infection.

Who is most at risk?

- people over the age of 65
- patients who have a reduced immunity
- those who have recently received antibiotics
- those who have had gut surgery
- those how receive their feed via a tube

What will happen to me if I get *Clostridium difficile*?

If you are in hospital you may be asked to move to a single room or designated ward. You will also be allocated a toilet or commode specifically for your use. This will help prevent spread of the infection to other patients.

You must make sure you wash your hands well after using the toilet and before meals. Wet wipes are available, so please ask. **Please note:** alcohol hand rubs are not effective against *Clostridium difficile* so please use soap and water or ask the staff what to do.

Staff will wear aprons and gloves to look after you and wash their hands before and after giving you care. This will help prevent the spread of infection to other patients.

How is it treated?

A course of antibiotics prescribed by your medical team should settle the diarrhoea. Other medication to stop the diarrhoea is not prescribed as it can cause additional irritation to your bowel.

The medical team will check that you are drinking enough fluids so you do not become dehydrated.

Will any of my treatment be delayed?

Generally, investigations and treatments will continue with staff taking the correct precautions. However, sometimes we may have to delay non-urgent investigations if you are experiencing severe diarrhoea.

How will I know when the *Clostridium difficile* is no longer infectious?

Once the diarrhoea has stopped for at least 72 hours and you have passed a formed stool you are getting better and considered not infectious.

Can it come back?

Yes, some patients may suffer a relapse of diarrhoea. Please contact your GP if you develop diarrhoea after you are discharged from hospital. Please also inform the GP of your previous *Clostridium difficile* infection.

Can I have visitors?

Yes, you can have visitors as healthy people are at very little risk of getting *Clostridium difficile* whilst visiting.

Your visitors will be asked to report to the nurse in charge before visiting and to wash their hands with soap and water as they come and go.

We ask visitors who are unwell (e.g. taking antibiotics, have an upset stomach, heavy cold or chest infection) to stay away until they are better. If you are in doubt, you should discuss this with the staff looking after you.

Your visitors will not require gloves and aprons unless they are helping with your personal care. Your visitors should not sit on your bed and only use public toilets.

Can my washing be sent home?

Yes, laundry can still be taken home and washed as usual. Wash soiled laundry on a separate cycle and at 60°C if the fabric will withstand the temperature.

Can I go home with *Clostridium difficile*?

You would normally wait until the diarrhoea has settled and your medical team is satisfied that you are fit for discharge. They will let you know if you need to continue treatment at home.

When you go home you should:

- continue to wash your hands with soap and water
- carry out your personal hygiene regularly but do not share towels and face cloths
- advise your family to wash their hands with soap and water if they have helped care for you
- clean surfaces in the bathrooms and toilets after use

The nurses will give you a *Clostridium difficile* patient-held card which you should show any healthcare professional who may prescribe antibiotics for you in the future.

Further questions:

The hospital has an Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPACT), they are:

Sheila Loveridge – Lead Infection Control Nurse Specialist

Sarah Prevett - Infection Control Nurse Specialist

A Consultant Microbiologist

Jo Thomas - Director of Infection Prevention and Control

Should you have any further concerns or questions, please speak to the ward staff who will contact a member of the team for you, alternatively you may telephone us directly:

Infection Prevention and Control Team

Tel: 01342 414341

Reference - *HSE, 2008.*

Please ask if you would like this leaflet in larger print or an alternative format.