

**Clostridioides  
difficile  
infection**

Information for people who are getting care, their visitors,  
and anyone else who is in a healthcare setting.

## About this leaflet

This leaflet is for people who are getting care, their visitors, and anyone else who is in a healthcare setting.

## What is *Clostridioides difficile*?

*Clostridioides difficile* is sometimes called *C. difficile* (or *C. diff*) for short. It is a bacterium (or germ) that some people have in their bowel. It doesn't normally cause any problems in healthy people.

## How does *C. difficile* infection (CDI) start?

The good bacteria in your gut will normally protect your body against this kind of infection. But if you are taking antibiotics to treat another infection, this can kill both the good and the bad bacteria. When this happens, the *C. difficile* bacteria can grow quickly and produce poisonous toxins in your bowel. This can start a *C. difficile* infection.

You are more likely to get the infection if you:

- are elderly;
- have had recent stays in hospital;
- have had certain medical procedures or operations to your bowel; or
- have reduced ability to fight infection (a weakened immune system).

## How do I know if I have *C. difficile* infection?

Your doctor will examine you and ask about your symptoms. If you have diarrhoea, a sample of your poo will be sent to the laboratory to test for a *C. difficile* infection. The test will confirm your result in one or two days.

Some people will only have a mild infection that lasts a few days. Diarrhoea can sometimes clear up on its own without any treatment.

In more severe cases, the effects of a *C. difficile* infection can be more serious and symptoms can last for several weeks. You might need treatment for the

toxins in your gut from the infection. Your diarrhoea might have blood in it and you may have pain in your stomach.

In a very small number of cases, having a *C. difficile* infection can make you very unwell and even be a threat to your life.

## How does *C. difficile* spread to people in healthcare settings?

*C. difficile* spores are passed out in the poo of people who are infected and can survive for a long time on any surface, for example on furniture, the toilet, sheets, and frequently touched surfaces such as beds and buzzers. You can accidentally pick the infection up by touching dirty or contaminated surfaces and then touching your mouth or eating. All staff, visitors, and anyone receiving care can spread the infection to themselves or other people if they don't wash their hands properly or after contact with anyone receiving care, their surroundings or contaminated equipment.

## What are healthcare settings doing to stop *C. difficile* from spreading?

If you have symptoms of *C. difficile* infection you may get a single room with your own toilet or be put into a certain area of the care setting.

Staff will wear disposable aprons and gloves for your care and in any areas where *C. difficile* infection is present. Staff will put used aprons and gloves in the healthcare waste bin. They will then wash their hands with running water and liquid soap and dry them with paper towels.

Visitors and anyone receiving care must wash and dry their hands really well. Alcohol-based hand rubs on their own do not work against the *C. difficile* bacterium. Anyone who is not able to wash their hands will be helped, especially after using the toilet and before eating.

Care areas should be free of clutter and disinfected with a bleach solution as well as being cleaned in the normal way. If bleach can't be used, staff should check the risk in the area to make sure another effective cleaning method is used.

Precautions to prevent and control infection will be put in place to stop the infection spreading until you have had no symptoms for 48 hours and your bowels are working normally again.

Your doctor might stop or change your antibiotics or medicine for any stomach complaints.

## Top tips to prevent *C. difficile* spreading

Healthy people are not usually at risk of getting *C. difficile* and should be able to visit anyone who has *C. difficile*.

If you are visiting someone in a health or other care setting, you should:

- always wash and dry your hands thoroughly, using running water, liquid soap and disposable paper towels;
- not bring in food;
- not eat at the bedside of the person you are visiting;
- not sit on beds;
- not visit other people receiving care at the same time;
- not use the same toilet as the person receiving care; and
- not visit someone if you feel unwell.

## What happens when I go home?

The care staff will have told your GP that you have had a *C. difficile* infection. They will do this because it may affect how you are prescribed antibiotics or medicine for stomach complaints in the future.

If you have symptoms of diarrhoea or *C. difficile* again, you should contact your GP. You may have to give another sample of your poo to your GP.