

Clostridium difficile

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile (sometimes referred to as *C. diff*) is a bacterium (germ) that can be found in people's intestines (gut) and can cause diarrhoea.

How do you catch it?

Clostridium difficile is present in the environment, in hospitals, and may also be a normal part of 3 in every 100 people's bowel contents. People get *Clostridium difficile* by swallowing the spores (tiny cells that help the germ reproduce) that it produces. The main way to avoid this is by ensuring that you wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before preparing and eating food. People in hospital can come into contact with this germ during their hospital stay but not everyone develops symptoms. Diarrhoea may occur when someone is given a course of antibiotics. Antibiotics are important medicines that can be used to treat patients in hospital for various illnesses, such as urine or chest infections. The antibiotics help to kill the bacteria causing these conditions, but can also affect the natural balance of the good bacteria in the gut. This allows the *Clostridium difficile* bacteria to develop and cause diarrhoea. Other symptoms which may be experienced are loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain and tenderness.

What happens during my hospital admission?

During your hospital admission, you will be ideally allocated a side-room with your own hand basin and toilet facilities during the time which you are experiencing diarrhoea. Each episode of diarrhoea will be closely monitored on a stool chart and your nutritional and fluid intake and output will also be monitored by the healthcare team. It is important to inform a member of the healthcare team if you are experiencing these symptoms.

You will be provided with hand wipes for use prior to eating your meal to reduce the risk of *Clostridium difficile* remaining on your hands, so that you reduce the risk of ingestion. It is important to wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom/toilet. It is not necessary for visitors to wear gloves or aprons while they visit you (unless assisting with personal care). Visitors will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water prior to leaving your side-room. Alcohol hand gel should not be used on your hands as this does not effectively inactivate the *Clostridium difficile* infection.

Healthcare staff will wear gloves and aprons while you are in the side-room when delivering your care. Your side-room will be cleaned twice a day by the housekeeping

team. Please try to limit your personal belongings while you are experiencing diarrhoea to enhance effective cleaning of your bed space. Nursing staff will also clean clinical equipment within your side-room following use. Please inform the nurse in charge should you have any concerns regarding the cleanliness of your room or if you have any queries regarding your care or treatment.

Is *Clostridium difficile* serious?

The diarrhoea is usually mild but, occasionally, it can be severe. The most severe form is an illness called pseudomembranous colitis. This can be serious for people with complex health problems or illnesses, and can lead to further health complications or even cause death in a small number of cases.

How is it treated?

If possible, antibiotics which may have led to the diarrhoea will be stopped. This will be done as soon as the doctors are sure that the infection for which the antibiotics were given has got better. If the diarrhoea does not settle on its own then there are three different antibiotics which a patient may be treated with Metronidazole or Vancomycin or Fidoxamicin may be given in order to kill the *Clostridium difficile*. Whenever possible, treatment should be given by mouth and continued for a minimum of 10 days.

Can the diarrhoea come back?

One in five people may get the diarrhoea again after treatment with antibiotics, if this happens then the doctor might suggest another course of antibiotics.

Can *Clostridium difficile* be passed on to others?

The germ is easily passed to other people but they may not develop diarrhoea or have any other problems as a result of having this. If however they are taking antibiotics they are more at risk of developing *Clostridium difficile* diarrhoea. It is unusual for babies and children to develop *Clostridium difficile* diarrhoea even when they are taking antibiotics. If you have diarrhoea, you will be nursed in a single room. Staff and relatives providing direct care will be required to wear a disposable plastic apron and gloves. If your relatives are just visiting, but not providing direct care, then they do not need to wear an apron or gloves. However they do need to wash their hands with liquid soap and water when entering the single room and again when leaving the room. Thorough hand washing with liquid soap and water (not bars of soap to which spores can stick to) is an important preventative measure to stop the spread of *Clostridium difficile* for all staff, patients and visitors.

Laundry

Soiled laundry should be washed on a separate cycle, preferably at 60°C. Consider using biological rather than non biological powder. Do not overload the machine. Ask staff for a laundry information leaflet.

Do I need to stay in hospital?

If you are fit enough to leave hospital you will be sent home. Unless you are very unwell, you can continue taking your antibiotics to treat the *Clostridium difficile* at home. If your diarrhoea does not resolve or returns once you have been discharged from hospital please see your GP.

Hard surfaces especially toilets, toilet flush handles and toilet door handles should be cleaned with cleaning agents containing bleach. Do not use bleach on surfaces such as carpets or soft furnishings as it may damage them.

How do I find out more?

More information is available from your doctor or nurse. Other people that can answer your questions include the Consultant in Communicable Disease Control (CCDC) at the local Health Protection Team and members of the Infection Control Team at the hospital.

Health Protection Team
0344 225 3861

Infection Control Team
0118 322 6914

For more information about the Trust visit our website on www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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