



C diff (*Clostridium difficile*) patient Information leaflet

What is *Clostridium difficile* – C diff?

Clostridium difficile is a type of bacteria (bug). It is often called **C diff** for short, and that's the term we will use in this leaflet.

C diff bacteria live in the bowel along with many other bacteria. Usually, they cause no problems for people in good health. Sometimes, though, C diff grow too much in the bowel, and this can cause diarrhoea. This can happen when someone is taking antibiotics. Sometimes it happens after a person has finished a course of antibiotics.

How did I get C diff?

If a person has C diff in their bowel, the bacteria comes out of their body in their faeces (poo). The bacteria can then stick to hands and also to surfaces – for example toilet seats, table tops, beds, floors and so on. The bacteria can live on these surfaces for weeks. The bacteria are much too small to see, so even if something looks clean, the bacteria can still be there. You could pick up C diff without knowing it simply by touching a surface carrying the bacteria.

Also, if someone touches you and there is C diff on their hands, it can spread to you. If you get C diff on your hands, it can get into your mouth when you eat or drink and then start to grow in your bowel.

What are the symptoms of C diff?

If C diff bacteria grow too much in your bowel, you may get diarrhoea. The diarrhoea is often watery and can smell very bad. You may also suffer from stomach cramps, have a high temperature, have a sick tummy and lose your appetite.

Most people only get mildly sick and recover fully from C diff without any treatment. However, some people can get very sick with C diff and need a long and complicated course of treatment. Some people get better fairly quickly, but the diarrhoea comes back when they stop the treatment. A small number of people get C diff diarrhoea that keeps coming back after they stop treatment.



How do I know if I have C diff?

It is important to tell a member of staff caring for you if you get diarrhoea, a sample of your faeces (poo) can be sent to the lab. The sample is tested for the bacteria and viruses that can cause diarrhoea.

If you are in hospital when you get C diff, you will be moved to a single room or a special ward. You will have a toilet or commode for your own use. Please be sure to clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or commode and before meals. Staff looking after you will wear aprons and gloves, and clean their hands after caring for you. When the diarrhoea settles down, you may be asked to move back into a ward with other patients.

What treatment will I get if I have C diff diarrhoea?

In some cases, certain antibiotics may have caused the C diff diarrhoea. If that is the case, you may have to stop taking those antibiotics. You may be given different antibiotics to treat the C diff bacteria. It is important to drink plenty of fluids so that you don't become dehydrated because of the diarrhoea.

Can I have visitors if I am infected with C diff?

Yes, you can have visitors. If the people who visit you are reasonably healthy, they are at very low risk of getting any illness from C diff. However, visitors taking antibiotics or who are very ill themselves are at greater risk. If you know someone is taking antibiotics, or they're ill, you might want to tell them not to visit until your diarrhoea has settled.

All your visitors should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water at the end of the visit and not just use hand sanitizer. This helps to stop C diff from spreading. Also, your visitors should not sit on your bed in hospital.

How will I know when the C diff is no longer infectious?

Once the diarrhoea has stopped for two full days and your bowel motion (poo) is back to normal, you are on the mend and less likely to be infectious. However, C diff bacteria may stay in your bowel after the diarrhoea has stopped, and sometimes it can flare up again later. If the diarrhoea comes back, tell your doctor or nurse right away. If you need antibiotics for another illness, please tell your GP that you had C diff infection in the past. For you, and for everyone, it is safer not to take antibiotics if you do not need them.



What happens when I go home?

If you still have some diarrhoea when you go home, keep taking your treatment and drink plenty of fluids. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water after you go to the toilet and use a separate towel. Try to keep the toilet flushed and the toilet lid, rim and handle clean. C diff is usually a very low risk to family and friends if they are in reasonably good health and not on antibiotics. Family and visitors should wash their hands after going to the toilet and before eating. This helps to prevent the spread of C diff. In any case, it is always recommended that people wash their hands every time they use the toilet.

Clean hands protect you and others from lots of infections, not just C diff.

Further information

If you have any questions or if you require more information about C diff, please talk to the healthcare staff caring for you. There is further information on hand hygiene, infection control and managing superbugs at home on www.hse.ie/infectioncontrol

This information is approved for use by the HSE's Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control national programme. Text awarded Plain English mark from the National Adult Literacy Agency

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