

CLOSTRIDIUM *difficile* INFECTION FAQ

Last Reviewed May 2013

What is Clostridium *difficile*?

Clostridium *difficile* (*C. difficile* or *C. diff*) is a bacteria that grows and releases toxins in the gut when antibiotics destroy a person's good bowel bacteria. *C. difficile* can be mild or serious, and in rare cases, it can cause death. Some people can have *C. difficile* bacteria present in their bowel and not show symptoms. For healthy people, *C. difficile* does not pose a health risk.

How do people get *C. difficile* infection?

C. difficile bacteria are found in feces. People can get infected by touching surfaces contaminated with feces, and then touching their mouths. Healthcare workers can spread the bacteria to their patients if their hands are contaminated. *C. difficile* bacteria produce spores that can live on surfaces for months, especially where feces is found — consistent hand hygiene (by staff, patients and visitors) and thorough cleaning of the patient environment and equipment is necessary for control.

Who is at greater risk for developing *C. difficile* infection?

Those at an increased risk of contracting *C. difficile* infection include:

- Antibiotic usage (recent or current)
- Increased age (over 65)
- Medications to reduce stomach acid (proton pump inhibitors)
- Chemotherapy
- Bowel disease and bowel surgery
- Immunosuppressive therapy post-transplant
- Prolonged hospitalization

What are the symptoms of *C. difficile* infection?

C. difficile may cause mild to severe symptoms that include watery diarrhea, abdominal pain, fever, loss of appetite, dehydration and nausea.



**Always clean
your hands with
soap and water
or alcohol based
hand rub,
particularly after
going to the
toilet and before
eating food.**



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

If you start to have symptoms of watery diarrhea and are taking, or recently took, antibiotics, a sample of your stool will be sent to the laboratory for testing. You will be informed of the result by your healthcare provider.

How is *C. difficile* treated?

In most cases, people only develop mild symptoms and are taken off antibiotics (if possible) - this usually results in rapid improvement. It may be necessary to be placed on specific antibiotics that treat *C. difficile* infection and, in some instances, several courses of antibiotics may be required to clear the infection.

Your stay at the hospital with *C. difficile*.

At the onset of diarrhea, you will be placed on "isolation". Once laboratory results confirm a *C. difficile* infection, additional precautions will be put into place. You may be moved to a new bed space and will be assigned your own bathroom/ toilet or commode chair. Staff will wear gloves and gowns when engaging in your care. To help stop the spread of *C. difficile* to other patients and the hospital environment, staff will wash their hands before and after providing care and will ensure all equipment is cleaned between patient use.

Can I have visitors if I have a *C. difficile* Infection?

Yes. *C. difficile* is not a risk for healthy people. Visitors that are unwell are encouraged NOT to visit until they become completely well again.

Visitors are asked to clean their hands before and after entering any healthcare facility and hospital room. It is also recommended that common areas are accessed before visits, not after. Visitors should not use patient bathrooms and should refrain from eating or drinking in the patient rooms.

How is Interior Health preventing the spread of *C. difficile*?

Interior Health takes *C. difficile* very seriously. All patients presenting with diarrhea are placed on 'isolation'. Cleaning the environment is increased to twice daily using a sporicidal disinfectant. Ongoing staff education regarding hand hygiene, cleaning equipment and decluttering the healthcare environment is provided. Ongoing surveillance for new or recurring *C. difficile* cases is done and actions implemented immediately when clusters or increasing trends are identified.

If you have any questions that were not answered here, please ask a nurse on your ward, or ask to speak with a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team.



Always clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub, particularly after going to the toilet and before eating food.



For more info, visit:
www.interiorhealth.ca