

# Clostridium difficile

## Infection

### What is Clostridium Difficile?

Clostridium difficile (also known as C. difficile or C.diff) is a germ that can be found in people's intestines (their 'digestive tract' or 'gut'). About 3 per cent of adults and two thirds of babies carry this without any ill effects.

### How can you catch it?

A person may develop Clostridium difficile infection by ingesting bacteria following direct contact with a contaminated environment or person who has the infection.

In most healthy people Clostridium difficile will not be able to multiply in the gut and they will not develop an infection. In some more vulnerable people, particularly those whose normal gut bacteria have been disrupted by antibiotic treatment, the Clostridium difficile may be able to multiply in the gut and go on to cause infection.

The antibiotics help to kill the bacteria causing their illness, but can also affect the natural balance of the good bacteria in the gut. It is common to give antibiotics to people as a treatment for various illnesses. This allows the Clostridium difficile bacteria to produce a toxin (poison) that then causes diarrhoea.

### What are the Symptoms?

Clostridium difficile infection mainly causes diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever and, in some rare cases, vomiting can also be present. Clostridium difficile bacteria produce toxins, which can damage the inner lining of the lower gut.

There are different strains of Clostridium difficile and some can cause a more serious illness than others.

### How is Clostridium difficile infection diagnosed?

The diagnosis is made from a sample of diarrhoea that is sent to the laboratory. If someone is showing the symptoms of diarrhoea, precautions will be taken. These include moving the person to a single room (isolation) and strict hand hygiene using soap and water.

The fact that you have a C difficile infection will be recorded in your medical notes and electronic patient record.



---

## Who is at risk?

Various strains of Clostridium difficile affect all age groups. The risk increases:

- In people who are taking antibiotics
- If someone has had stomach and/or digestive tract surgery or investigations
- When someone has a prolonged length of stay in hospital
- In people with medical conditions that can lower their immunity
- In older people

## How is Clostridium difficile treated?

Clostridium difficile infection can be treated with specific antibiotics known to be effective, namely Metronidazole or Vancomycin, which should be given by mouth. If you are on other antibiotics or medication these may be stopped or changed to a more suitable antibiotic.

## How does it spread?

Infection is spread on the hands of healthcare workers, carers and people who have contact with infected patients and their surroundings.

---

## How to prevent the spreading of C.diff

Healthcare services can prevent the spread of Clostridium difficile in the following ways:

- Making sure people receive antibiotics only when necessary
- Making sure the most suitable antibiotics are given when needed
- Making sure patients with Clostridium difficile diarrhoea are nursed in a single room or grouped together if unable to isolate, to reduce the risk of spreading the infection
- Making sure disposable aprons and gloves are worn by staff when caring for patients with Clostridium difficile diarrhoea and disposing of them promptly when the activity is completed.
- Making sure staff and visitors wash their hands with soap and water after contact with patients.
- By ensuring rigorous cleaning with hand-hot water and detergent containing chlorine as this is the most effective means of removing Clostridium difficile spores from the contaminated environment
- By ensuring Patients are able to wash their hands with soap and water, especially before eating and after toilet use.

Alcohol hand rub is not effective against Clostridium difficile spores. Hand washing with soap and water is the most effective method to prevent the spread of infection.

## What precautions should be followed by family and friends?

Family and friends should wash their hands with soap and water before and after visiting someone in hospital. Those who provide direct patient care are advised to wear disposable plastic aprons and gloves. Visitors should not sit on the patient's bed. Please speak to the nursing staff for advice.



## Do patients who develop Clostridium difficile infection have to stay in hospital longer?

Patients who experience symptoms of diarrhoea may need to stay in hospital until their symptoms have settled

## What happens if I think I've developed Clostridium difficile infection at home?

Contact your GP or your district nursing team if you have symptoms of diarrhoea. If a stool specimen confirms that you have developed Clostridium difficile infection, you will probably be prescribed some treatment.

The following precautions should be taken to prevent the spread of the infection:

- Hand washing with soap and water. This should be strictly followed by you, district nurses, carers or any family members in your household. Please ensure you have liquid soap and paper kitchen towels available for visiting healthcare staff to wash and dry their hands.
- Any soiled clothing and bedding should be washed separately at the highest possible temperature. *Further information is available in our Advice for carers on laundering patients' soiled clothing leaflet, available on the Berkshire Healthcare website <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/>*
- The toilet (and commode) should be cleaned with domestic bleach. Once the symptoms of diarrhoea have settled you're less likely to be infectious.

### How to contact us

If you need to contact us or require further information...

Infection Prevention and Control Team

Phone: 01189 605140

[www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk](http://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk)



### Further Information

For general information about infection prevention and control refer to: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Alternatively you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**, who can listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and direct you to further information. They can be Contacted on 01189 605027 or [bht@berkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:bht@berkshire.nhs.uk)

