

What is Clostridium difficile (C.diff)?

Advice for patients and families

C.diff is an infection which commonly affects people who have recently been treated with antibiotics. Follow our guidance here on how to reduce your risk of catching and spreading the infection.

What is Clostridium Difficile (C.diff)?

Clostridium difficile, also known as C. difficile or C.diff, is a germ that can be found in our intestines (our gut).

There are different strains of C.diff and some can cause a more serious infection than others. However, C.diff won't develop into an infection in most healthy people. About 3 per cent of all adults and two thirds of babies carry this without any symptoms or illness.

How do you catch a C.diff infection?

You may develop C.diff infection by ingesting bacteria, after direct contact with a contaminated environment or contact with someone who has the infection.

Antibiotics can help kill the bacteria causing other illnesses, but can also affect the natural balance of the good bacteria in your gut. This may allow the C.diff bacteria to produce a toxin (poison) that then causes diarrhoea.

In more vulnerable people, particularly those whose normal gut bacteria has been disrupted by antibiotic treatment, C.diff may be able to multiply in the gut and go on to cause infection.

What are the symptoms?

If you have the C.diff infection, you may experience diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever, and in some rare cases, vomiting.

How is C.diff infection diagnosed?

C.diff infection is diagnosed by sending a sample of diarrhoea to a laboratory for testing.

If you're showing the symptoms of diarrhoea, precautions will be taken such as hand washing with soap and water, and treating you in a separate room (isolation).

Who is at risk?

Various strains of C.diff affect all age groups. A number of different things can increase the risk of developing C.diff, such as:

- If you're taking antibiotics
- If you've had stomach and/or digestive tract surgery or investigations
- If you've had a prolonged length of stay in hospital
- If you have a medical condition which affects your immune system
- If you're older

How is C.diff treated?

C.diff can be treated with specific antibiotics, such as Metronidazole or Vancomycin. If you're taking other antibiotics, we may change these to a more suitable type.

If you're experiencing symptoms of C.diff while you're in hospital, you may need to stay with us until you're feeling better.

How to prevent the spread of C.diff

We can all play a part in preventing the spread of C.diff related infections.

What we can do

- Our staff will make sure you're receiving the most suitable antibiotics, and only when necessary
- We'll make sure you're treated in a separate room (isolated) if you have a C.diff infection, or grouped together with other patients to reduce the risk of spreading the infection
- Our staff wear disposable aprons and gloves when caring for you and will dispose of them promptly
- We make sure all staff and visitors wash their hands with soap and water after contact with you
- We clean the environment and equipment used in your care properly with hot water and detergents containing chlorine

What you can do

- Make sure you, and your family, wash your hands properly with soap and water, especially before eating and after visiting the toilet - using alcohol hand rub on its own is not effective against C.diff spores
- Wash any soiled clothing and bedding separately at the highest possible temperature
- Have liquid soap and paper kitchen towels available so that our visiting carers can wash and dry their hands properly if you're receiving care at home
- Clean your toilet and bathroom with domestic bleach

What your visitors can do

Family and friends visiting you can also help, by washing their hands with soap and water before and after they see you. If someone is caring for you, they should also wear disposable plastic aprons and gloves. Our staff can help you if you have any questions.

What happens if I think I have developed C.diff at home?

If you develop symptoms of diarrhoea contact your GP or your district nursing team. If a stool specimen confirms that you have C.diff you will probably be prescribed some treatment.

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

- Make sure you, and your family, wash your hands properly with soap and water, especially before eating and after visiting the toilet - using alcohol hand rub on its own is not effective against C.diff spores
- Wash any soiled clothing and bedding separately at the highest possible temperature
- Have liquid soap and paper kitchen towels available so that our visiting carers can wash and dry their hands properly if you're receiving care at home
- Clean your toilet and bathroom with domestic bleach

Further advice

You can find further advice from the NHS on how to prevent the spread of infections.

www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/infections

How to contact us

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

Call: **0118 960 5140**

Email: infection.control@berkshire.nhs.uk

www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk

