

Clostridioides difficile (formerly known as Clostridium difficile)

What is Clostridioides difficile?

Clostridioides difficile (also known as C. difficile or C. diff), is a spore forming bacterium (germ). It lives harmlessly in the human gut, in approximately one in 20 people, without causing any problems. It is held in check by the normal 'good' bacteria present in the gut.

However, when the normal gut bacteria are disturbed, e.g. by antibiotic therapy, regular use of laxatives, proton pump inhibitors, or bowel surgery, Clostridioides difficile can multiply and may cause infection of the gut.

Signs and symptoms:

- Watery and/or bloody diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps
- Feeling sick and loss of appetite
- A raised temperature (fever)

Most people only become mildly/ moderately unwell and make a full recovery. However, in a small number of people, more severe inflammation of the bowel (colitis) may occur, leading to more severe symptoms, which may be life threatening.

How is Clostridioides difficile diagnosed?

A sample of diarrhoea is sent to the laboratory, where it is tested for Clostridioides difficile.

Who is at risk?

- People who are on or have recently completed a course of antibiotics. Those who have received several courses of antibiotics are at greater risk
- People who are already ill and vulnerable to infection (eg those receiving treatment for cancer) People over the age of 65 years, who make up over 80% of cases
- People receiving other medications or bowel surgery that upset the normal gut bacteria
- Children above the age of two years are occasionally affected.

What happens if I have Clostridioides difficile diarrhoea while I'm in the hospice?

All hospice rooms are single rooms, which will reduce the risk of the coliform bacteria being passed to other patients.

- Please do not walk freely around the IPU, instead limit your movement to your bed space/room. This is to protect other vulnerable patients on the IPU.
- Please remember to wash your hands with soap and water, after using the toilet and before eating and drinking.
- Staff will wear disposable gloves and plastic aprons when caring directly for you, and will wash their hands using soap and water rather than using alcohol hand rub.
- It is helpful to keep your locker and bed-side table tidy and clutter-free, to allow all surfaces to be cleaned thoroughly.

What is the treatment?

Good hand hygiene is one of the best ways of tackling infection. Use soap and water – alcohol hand rub is not effective in eliminating *Clostridioides difficile*.

The antibiotic that caused the problem may be stopped. This will allow the normal gut bacteria to grow back. You may be given another antibiotic, such as Metronidazole or Vancomycin to treat the *Clostridioides difficile* infection.

Can I have visitors if I have *Clostridioides difficile* diarrhoea?

- Yes, you can have visitors, as healthy people are at very little risk of developing *Clostridioides difficile* infection
- Visitors should wash their hands with soap and water after visiting you, before leaving the Inpatient Unit (IPU)
- Visitors do not need to routinely wear gloves and an apron, but are needed if they are helping you with your personal care
- Visitors should sit on the chairs provided, not on your bed and only use the toilets in reception.

How will I know when the *Clostridioides difficile* is no longer infectious to others?

Once the diarrhoea has stopped for at least 48 hours and your bowel motion is back to normal, you are on the mend and no longer infectious to others

However, *Clostridioides difficile* can remain in your gut for a period of time afterwards and the diarrhoea may return (particularly if you receive further antibiotic therapy to treat another infection). If you do develop diarrhoea again, seek medical advice.

Can I go home with *Clostridioides difficile* diarrhoea?

- Your doctor will assess you and discharge you from the hospice when you are fit enough to go home
- Remember to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before eating
- Do not share personal items, such as towels and face cloths, whilst you are having diarrhoea
- Machine wash soiled laundry, separate from other laundry, on the hottest wash cycle suitable for the linen and clothing
- Ask your family or carers to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water after caring for you
- Avoid using the same toilet as your family members whilst you are having diarrhoea and if this is not possible, ensure the toilet is cleaned/disinfected after your use
- Clean/disinfect bathroom surfaces regularly; paying particular attention to the sink taps, toilet flush handle, toilet seat and toilet bowl.

(Adapted from the *Clostridioides difficile* leaflet from the Department of Infection Prevention and Control)