

## Infection Prevention and Control

# Clostridium difficile- Information for patients and relatives

You may have been told you have Clostridium difficile. This leaflet has been produced to help you understand what is meant by this and to answer some of your questions

### What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (C. diff) is a germ that sometimes lives naturally in our bowel. Some bacteria that live inside our bowel help to keep us healthy, but Clostridium difficile has no specific job in promoting our health, it simply forms part of our normal bowel flora.

### Why does it cause problems?

When a person is healthy the millions of good bacteria in the bowel keep the Clostridium difficile bacteria under control. When a person is ill and needs to take antibiotics the levels of good bacteria are reduced. This allows the Clostridium difficile bacteria to multiply quickly. As it multiplies it produces a toxin (poison) that may cause inflammation of the bowel (colitis). This leads to diarrhoea which can sometimes be quite severe.

Symptoms vary from abdominal cramps, mild diarrhoea to frequent watery stools. Sometimes blood may be seen in stools. Some patients may develop a more serious infection called pseudo- membranous colitis

### How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor or nurse will purposely look for evidence of Clostridium difficile if you develop diarrhoea.

A stool sample will be sent to the laboratory where staff will look for the toxin (poison) produced by the Clostridium difficile bacteria.

If the toxin is found the laboratory will inform your doctor who will ensure appropriate treatment is given according to your symptoms.

### How long does the treatment take?

Depending on your symptoms you may be nursed in isolation (a single room) and prescribed a course of antibiotics to reduce the levels of Clostridium difficile bacteria in the bowel.

Treatment lasts around 10-14 days. If symptoms do not settle after a few days a different antibiotic may be prescribed. It is important to complete the course of antibiotics even if your diarrhoea settles and you are well enough to go home.



## Patient Information

### **Can this bacteria spread?**

It can spread on hands or equipment and is able to remain in the environment for many weeks. Those at greatest risk are people taking antibiotics.

### **How do we prevent the spread?**

If you have diarrhoea you may be moved into a single room and nursed in isolation to help prevent the spread of bacteria and allow some privacy whilst you have diarrhoea. While you are experiencing diarrhoea we will ask you to remain in your side room with your door closed. If you have any concerns please discuss with the nurse in charge.

Staff will wear protective clothing whilst caring for you and a commode or toilet will be allocated for your use only.

If there are several people with the same diagnosis you may be nursed together in a same sex bay.

Hand washing with soap and water is especially important after using the toilet. Cleanliness of the environment is especially important. If you have concerns please speak to the nurse in charge. Normally patients stay in a single room until they have had no diarrhoea for 48hrs – 72hrs.

### **Can I have visitors?**

You may have visitors, but seek advice from staff on the ward. They do not need to wear aprons and gloves. **They need to wash their hands with soap and water**, before entering or leaving the room (alcohol gel is not effective against this germ). If visitors are providing personal care then they need to wear aprons and gloves.

Your laundry must be bagged and remain in your room ready for collection. It should be washed on the highest temperature recommended by the clothing manufacturer using your usual detergent. If your laundry is soiled and you would prefer the hospital to dispose of it please ask your nurse.

Specialist advice for safe laundering of soiled items should be sought from your ward nurse

### **Will it stop me going home?**

Your discharge should not be delayed once you are well enough to go home.

What should I do if my symptoms come back after stopping treatment?

Occasionally the infection may come back after stopping treatment. It is important that you seek medical advice as soon as possible. If the symptoms of *Clostridium difficile* infection return you may require further treatment.

### **How you can help us to help you?**

- Always wash your hands after using the toilet and before eating. Do not be afraid to ask the staff to help you to clean your hands if you cannot do it yourself.
- Keep yourself as clean as possible. Take toiletries and a towel into hospital with you. Use a dispensed soap, as soggy bar soap can easily breed bacteria. Whatever, you use, always remember to bring it back from the wash/bathroom, so that no one else uses it.

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- If you are bed bound for a while, it is useful to have some moist hand wipes, so that you can clean your hands. This is especially important after using the commode or before meals.
- Men should have their own shaving equipment.
- Staff can help keep you free from infection by washing their hands with soap and water. If a member of staff needs to undertake a procedure or close care with you, do not be afraid to ask them if they have cleaned their hands.
- Insist your visitors wash their hands before and after visiting.
- Try to keep the top of your locker and bed-table reasonably free from clutter. Too much clutter makes cleaning of these areas difficult.
- The area around your bed will be cleaned regularly. If you or your visitors see something that has been missed during routine cleaning, please tell a member of the ward staff.

### **What if I need to take antibiotics in the future?**

If you need antibiotics in the future it does not mean you will develop Clostridium difficile again, but do tell the staff caring for you on the ward or your GP.

If you wish to speak to the Infection Prevention and Control Nurses about any issues relating to Clostridium difficile, please ask the nurse looking after you.

**The Infection Prevention and Control Nurses are available, Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 5.00 pm to speak to you or your family.  
Contact us on Telephone number 024 7696 4791**

### **Other leaflets produced by the Infection Prevention and Control Team include:**

- Isolation and Barrier Nursing
- ESBL
- MRSA
- Clean Hands are Caring Hands

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 4791 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

### **Document History**

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