

## Infection Prevention & Control

# Clostridioides difficile - Information for patients and relatives

You may have been told you have Clostridioides difficile (C. diff).

This leaflet has been produced to help you understand what this is and to answer some of your questions.

### What is C. diff?

C. diff is a germ that sometimes lives naturally in our bowel.

Some bacteria live inside our bowel help to keep us healthy. C. diff has no specific job in keeping us healthy - it simply forms part of our normal bowel flora.

Approximately 3% of healthy adults and up to 66% of infants have C. diff in their gut without it causing any harm.

### Why does it cause problems?

When a person is healthy, the millions of good bacteria in the bowel keep the C. diff bacteria under control.

When a person is ill and needs to take antibiotics, the levels of good bacteria decrease. This allows the C. diff bacteria to multiply quickly.



## Patient Information

As *C. diff* multiplies, it produces a toxin (poison) that may cause inflammation of the bowel (colitis).

This leads to diarrhoea which can sometimes be quite severe.

### **You are more at risk of developing *C. diff* infection if you:**

- Are over the age of 65
- Are taking or have had antibiotics or other medications that alter the bacteria in the gut
- Have an immune system which is not working properly
- Have undergone gut surgery
- Have inflammatory bowel disease

In most cases, the effects of a *C. diff* infection are relatively mild. Sometimes, *C. diff* infection can lead to serious illness.

### **Symptoms**

- Mild to severe diarrhoea, often watery
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain or tenderness
- Occasionally, severe inflammation of the bowel

### **How is it diagnosed?**

Your doctor or nurse will look for evidence of *C. diff* if you develop diarrhoea.

A stool (poo) sample will be sent to the laboratory. Staff will look for the toxin (poison) produced by the *C. diff* bacteria.

## Patient Information

If the toxin is found in the sample, the laboratory will tell your doctor. The doctor will prescribe any treatment needed, depending on your symptoms.

### **How long does the treatment take?**

Treatment lasts around 10-14 days.

Depending on your symptoms you may be nursed in isolation (a single room). You may be prescribed a course of antibiotics to reduce the levels of *C. diff* bacteria in the bowel.

If your 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.

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

*C. diff* can spread on hands or equipment. It can remain in the environment for many weeks.

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

If you have diarrhoea, you may be moved into a single room and nursed in isolation. This helps prevent the spread of bacteria. It also gives you some privacy whilst you have diarrhoea.

While you have diarrhoea, we will ask you to remain in your single room with your door closed.

Normally, patients stay in a single room until they have had no diarrhoea for 48 – 72 hours.

If you are worried about being in a single room, please discuss this with the nurse in charge.

## Patient Information

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

Staff will wear protective clothing whilst caring for you. A commode or toilet will be allocated for your use only until you have had no diarrhoea for 48hrs – 72hrs.

**Hand washing with soap and water** is especially important after using the toilet. Cleanliness of the environment is also very important.

Please speak to the nurse in charge if you have any concerns:

- about being able to clean your hands
- about the environment

## Can I have visitors?

You may have visitors but seek advice from staff on the ward.

Visitors do not need to wear aprons and gloves unless they are helping you with personal care.

All visitors **need to wash their hands with soap and water** before entering or leaving the room. Alcohol gel is not effective against this germ.

## Laundry

Your laundry must be bagged and remain in your room ready for collection.

It should be washed on the highest temperature recommended by the manufacturer using your usual detergent.

If your laundry is soiled and you would prefer if the hospital disposed of it, please ask your nurse.

Specialist advice for **safe laundering** of soiled items is available from your ward nurse (also see [Other Leaflets](#), page 6)

## 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 C. diff infection return, you may require further treatment.

## How can you help us to help you?

- Always wash your hands with soap and water 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 no one else uses it.
- If you are bed bound for a while, it helps 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 bedtable reasonably free from clutter. Too much clutter makes cleaning of these areas difficult.

## Patient Information

- 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 C. diff again. But remind the staff caring for you on the ward or your GP that you have had C. diff.

If you wish to speak to the Infection Prevention and Control Team about any issues relating to C. diff, please ask the nurse looking after you.

**The Infection Prevention and Control Team are available to speak to you or your family Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm.**

**Contact us on Telephone number 024 7696 4791.**

### **Other leaflets**

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

- Isolation and Barrier Nursing
- Clean Hands are Caring Hands
- Patient's Clothing bags (PCB)

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.

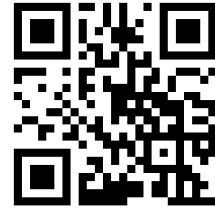
The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

## Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

Have your say. Scan the QR code or visit:

[www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback](http://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback)



### Document History

Department:	Infection Prevention
Contact:	24791
Updated:	June 2023
Review:	June 2025
Version:	12
Reference:	HIC/LFT/159/06