

Clostridioides difficile infection

Consumer information

What is *Clostridioides difficile*?

Clostridioides difficile is a spore-forming bacteria that often lives in the gut of humans and animal. It does not always cause disease and may be present in the gut of healthy babies and adults.

How does *Clostridioides difficile* cause infection?

C. difficile infection (CDI) may occur when there is a change to the normal bacteria that live in the gut, such as when someone has taken antibiotics to treat another illness. *C. difficile* spores that are in the gut can produce toxins that cause inflammation of the gut lining which can cause diarrhoea.

Who is at risk of getting CDI?

People at risk for getting CDI are:

- those who have had antibiotics
- older people
- people who have had a long stay in hospital
- residents in an aged care facility or nursing home
- those being treated with immunosuppressive therapy, chemotherapy or gastric acid suppressive therapy
- those who have had gastrointestinal tract surgery

What are the symptoms of CDI?

Symptoms of CDI may include watery diarrhoea, fever, abdominal pain or tenderness, loss of appetite and nausea. Symptoms can be mild, but severe cases can result in serious damage to the bowel.

How do we test for CDI and how is it treated?

The diagnosis of CDI is made when a small amount of poo is sent to the laboratory from a person with symptoms and tested for *C. difficile* toxin. Treatment of CDI is usually with a course of oral antibiotics. CDI can be difficult to treat, and it may come back, so close medical follow-up is important after CDI has been diagnosed.

How do we prevent *Clostridioides difficile* spreading to others?

C. difficile spores can be spread into the environment from the poo of a person with *C. difficile*. When someone touches those surfaces, the spores can get on their hands and then be swallowed and cause infection. To prevent the spread of the spores, it is important to have a clean environment and wash your hands.

How will CDI affect my hospital stay?

If you have CDI, it's important for staff to stop *C. difficile* spreading to other patients.

They do this by:

- caring for you in a single room
- cleaning their hands after touching you or your surroundings
- wearing gloves and gowns/aprons when they come into your room, and removing them when they leave your room.

It's very important for you to help stop *C. difficile* spreading too.

Wash your hands with soap and running water:

- before handling food or drinks
- after going to the toilet
- after handling dirty washing
- when leaving your room.

Follow instructions from your nurse or doctor.

Can I have visitors while I am in hospital?

There are usually no restrictions on visitors but please check with the nursing staff if you or your visitors have any concerns.

Your visitors, including children, must wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand rub **every** time they leave your hospital room, so they do not spread *C. difficile* to themselves or to other people. This is the most important way to prevent the spread of all germs.

Staff may also instruct your visitors to wear gloves and/or gowns/aprons while visiting you.

What about when I go home?

If you have recovered from CDI, there should be minimal risk of spreading *C. difficile* to other people.

If you have not recovered from CDI and while you have diarrhoea, you must maintain good hand washing as this is one of the most important ways of preventing infections spreading.

It is also important to keep your environment clean, particularly surfaces that are frequently touched including the bathroom and toilet. We also recommend that you do not share your towels and face washers with other people.

If your diarrhoea is not settling or if it comes back again, please see your doctor.

Make sure you clean your hands, especially after going to the toilet. This is one of the most important ways of preventing infections spreading.

Further questions?

Please ask your doctor or nurse if you have any more questions about *C. difficile*.

Public Health Services

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This information has been reviewed by Tasmanian consumers.