

Clostridiodes difficile

Information for patients and carers

What is Clostridiodes difficile?

Clostridium difficile is a bacterium (bug) that can be found in the bowel. It is found in healthy people and those who are unwell. About 3% of the population carries C. diff in their bowel without it causing harm. There are millions of normal bacteria that live in the bowel which help keep C. diff under control. C. diff can become harmful when found in large numbers.

What is Clostridiodes difficile Infection?

When there is an imbalance of the normal bacteria in the bowel, C. diff may become present in large numbers. When this happens it produces toxins (like a poison) that affect the lining of the bowel and give the symptoms of infection.

The symptoms are:

Diarrhoea which is often watery, cramping pain, sometimes you may experience nausea. Rarely blood may be seen in the stool/faeces.

Those at risk are:

- Patients over 65 years of age
- People who have had surgery on their bowel
- People with an impaired immune system, e.g. cancer patients
- Patients that have had antibiotics

What happens when I take antibiotics?

Some antibiotics change the balance of bacteria in our bowel, allowing C. diff bacterium to grow in greater numbers. This can cause diarrhoea and may lead to disease which can be severe in some cases.

How is Clostridiodes difficile infection diagnosed?

If a person has been taking, or is currently taking, antibiotics and has diarrhoea, then C. diff infection may be suspected. Diagnosis is made by sending a sample of faeces to the laboratory to confirm whether C. diff toxin is present.

How is Clostridiodes difficile infection spread?

A person is at greatest risk of getting C. diff infection if they are taking certain antibiotics. C. diff can produce spores that can survive in the environment for a long period of time. It can be spread from one person to another via the faecal-oral route, especially when a person has diarrhoea. In this instance, alcohol rub is not effective.

To avoid spreading the infection, strict hand hygiene using soap and water must be performed by the patient, their visitors and all staff.

Information for Patients

It is not normally necessary for visitors to wear gloves and aprons, however if visitors are having close contact with a patient who has C. diff infection (e.g. helping with washing and dressing) we recommend that they are worn. **Please ask the nurses if you are unsure.**

What happens in hospital once Clostridioides difficile infection is suspected?

Within hospital if C. diff infection is confirmed, you will be moved to a single room. This is to ensure that potential spread of the infection is limited. All healthcare staff will wash their hands with soap and water before and after contact with you, your bed linen and your surrounding environment. Healthcare staff will also wear gloves and an apron for care and interactions with you and your environment. Gloves and aprons will be removed before staff leaves the room and they will wash their hands with soap and water.

How long will I stay in a single room?

Once the diarrhoea has settled and your bowel motions have returned to normal, the Infection Prevention and Control Team will advise when you can go back onto the main ward.

How is Clostridioides difficile infection treated whilst in hospital?

In most incidences it is easily treated with a course of antibiotics that are active against C. diff. It is important that the whole course of antibiotic treatment is completed, even if the symptoms (diarrhoea and abdominal cramps) resolve, otherwise symptoms may re-occur. If this happens a further course of oral antibiotics may be prescribed. No further stool testing is required once Clostridium difficile infection has been diagnosed.

Will this prevent me from going home?

Having C. diff infection will not necessarily prevent you from going home. If you are being discharged to a nursing/residential home the hospital will inform the home of your condition prior to discharge.

What about my laundry?

Personal laundry should be bagged and kept in your room for relatives/friends to collect as soon as possible. Personal laundry from your stay in hospital should be washed separately. Wash items in the usual way with normal detergents, on a hot wash (60 degrees or above). Alternatively hospital clothing can be provided. **Remember to wash your hands after handling soiled linen.**

Can I have visitors?

You can have visitors but please seek advice from the nursing staff on the ward. All visitors will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water before entering and leaving your single room. Please remember that hand washing with soap and water is a key method to prevent the spread of any infection. There is a hand wash sink in all single rooms and at the entrances to all wards **Please use it on entering the ward and before you leave.**

Being open

To reduce the risk of healthcare associated infection a number of things have been implemented across the Trust:

- A dedicated team responsible for helping staff maintain a high standard of care in Infection Prevention and Control
- A comprehensive Infection Control and Prevention policy which is evidence based and regularly reviewed

Information for Patients

- All staff are required to attend a yearly education and training update
- A wide range of information leaflets have been produced for patients, carers and the public
- Infection rates are monitored across the trust, any risks or trends identified are reported monthly to the Infection Control and Prevention committee, the Trust Board and Public Health England

For further advice on any of the issues discussed within this leaflet, please ask any member of the nursing or medical staff.

Department address and contact information:

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team.

For Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham Tel: **0121 371 3785** (internal **13785**)

For Heartlands Hospital, Good Hope Hospital and Solihull Hospital
Tel: **0121 424 1137**

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk.