

Clostridium Difficile

Information Sheet

What is Clostridium *difficile*?

Clostridium difficile (also known as *C.diff*) is a bacterium that produces a toxin (type of poison). This toxin causes inflammation of the colon and diarrhea.

How do I get *C. difficile*?

Most often, you get this after taking antibiotics. They upset the balance of good bacteria in your intestines, allowing the *C. difficile* bacteria to grow and cause infection.

What are the symptoms?

The usual symptoms are watery diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain or tenderness. The diarrhea may appear less than a week after acquiring *C. difficile*, or not until the person is exposed to antimicrobials.

Who is more likely to get *C. difficile* disease?

The following risk factors can increase your chance of getting *C. difficile* disease:

- Currently taking or recently taken antimicrobials
- Gastro-intestinal surgery/manipulation
- A long stay in healthcare settings
- A serious underlying illness
- A weakened immune system
- Being elderly

How is Clostridium *difficile* spread?

Clostridium difficile is most often transmitted on the hands of health care personnel who have had contact with contaminated faeces or environment surfaces. The spores produced by *C. difficile* can survive in the environment for long periods of time and spread this disease. These spores have been found on surfaces such as bedding, commodes, bedpans, sinks, floors, thermometers and stethoscopes.

What is the difference between Colonization and Disease?

Colonization: *C. difficile* bacteria are present in an individual, but that person has no symptoms. Antibiotic therapy is not recommended.

Disease: A person has both the *C. difficile* bacteria and the symptoms. Antibiotic therapy should be discontinued or altered.

How is Clostridium *difficile* prevented?

Hand washing is the single most effective method of preventing this infection.

- Hand washing with antibacterial soap and water is especially important after handling faeces or assisting with toileting and diapering, and prior to eating, feeding or providing mouth care to others.
- Place the infected person in a private room. If no private room is available, designated nursing staff should look after the infected person. The isolation procedures should include dedicated equipment such as stethoscopes, thermometers and commode chairs that will be used for the infected person only.
- It is imperative that the surfaces in the room of a *C. difficile* positive person are properly cleaned and disinfected.