

Clostridium difficile – Patient Information



What is clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (C. diff) is a type of bacteria/germ that is easily spread and can cause diarrhoea and gastroenteritis in people.

How do you get Clostridium difficile?

You may get C. diff infection by accidentally ingesting the bacteria through touching contaminated environment or patient. C diff bacteria produces spores, which leave the body in an infected person's diarrhoea. The spores are resistant to the conditions outside the body and can survive for a several months.

They may contaminate the surroundings, such as toilets, bed linen, skin and clothing.



C. diff can also be spread from person to person via hands. This can occur by failing to wash hands properly after going to the toilet, or by touching contaminated surfaces or equipment.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- People with C. diff infection may have:
- Watery diarrhoea
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal (stomach) pain or tenderness.

Who is at risk of getting it?

Infection can occur in anyone who has:

- Been treated with antibiotics
- Undergone gastrointestinal surgery /manipulation had a long stay in a hospital or nursing home
- An immune system that is not working properly

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis should be guided by your doctor.

Laboratory testing of a faeces specimen will confirm a diagnosis of C. diff.

What is the treatment?

Your doctor will consider what treatment is required for you. If you develop diarrhoea whilst taking antibiotics tell your doctor.

If you developed C. diff infection while taking antibiotics, and only have mild diarrhoea, then you may be advised to stop the antibiotics. This may be enough to relieve the symptoms. More severe cases are usually treated with special antibiotics. It is important that the whole course of antibiotic treatment is completed, even if the symptoms disappear quickly. Occasionally C. diff infection may recur. If your symptoms recur after the treatment, tell your GP or family doctor.

Ways to prevent the spread of C.diff?

- Hand washing
- Contact precautions for any patients with suspected gastroenteritis.
- Contact precautions are extra precautions which should be used for all patients with diarrhoea or confirmed C. diff. These precautions help prevent spread of infections to other patients from an infected patient.
- Patients with C. diff will be isolated in a single room or may share a room with other patients with C. diff. The room will have a sign posted outside to remind staff and visitors about the strict protocols required:
- All staff and visitors must wear gloves and a gown and gloves before entering the patient's room
- An antiseptic-containing soap and water wash must be performed when entering and exiting the room.
- Infected patients may still receive visitors.
- However, visitors are discouraged from visiting other patients in the hospital

- Daily cleaning and disinfecting of each room with a bleach detergent such as Sodium Hypochlorite is required

Ceasing contact precautions

Patients may have Contact Precautions ceased when they are free of diarrhea for 48 hours.

Ask us if we have washed our hands

It is OK for you to remind the Doctor, Nurse or other Healthcare Worker to wash their hands before they touch you.

You can help us prevent infections Always wash your hands

- Before and after visiting patients
- After contact with blood
- After contact with other body substances
- After removing gloves or other protective clothing

When entering and exiting the room you must clean your hands by using an antiseptic soap and water



- Wet your hands before you apply soap.
- Rub the soap lather all over your hands.
- Wash all surfaces of your hands and fingers for at least 15-20 seconds.
- Be sure to get under your nails, around cuticles and between the fingers.
- Rinse your hands well, until all the soap comes off. Point your hands down as you rinse.
- Pat your hands completely dry using a clean paper towel.
- Turn off the tap with a paper towel to avoid contaminating your clean hands.
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- An antiseptic-containing soap and water wash must be performed when entering and exiting the room.
- Infected patients may still receive visitors.
- However, visitors are discouraged from visiting other patients in the hospital.
- Daily cleaning and disinfecting of each room with a bleach detergent such as Sodium Hypochlorite is required

Alcohol hand rubs/gels

These are available throughout all areas at Western Health. Apply a palm full of product in a cupped hand and rub it until it comes in contact with all surfaces of the hands. Rub together until the product dries off

Contact the Infection Prevention Team

Footscray Hospital
Phone: 03 8345 6783

Sunshine Hospital
Phone 03 8345 0210

Williamstown & Sunbury Day Hospital
Phone 04 19 311 375

The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights describes the rights of all people who use the Australian healthcare system. Copies of the charter in community languages are available near the main entrance of all Western Health hospitals, or ask a staff member or volunteer.

For more information, visit www.safetyandquality.gov.au/australian-charter-healthcare-rights



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