Clostridium Difficile (C diff) Fact Sheet

A leaflet for patients, relatives and visitors

What is Clostridium Difficile?

Clostridium Difficile (C.Diff) is a germ (bacterium) that is present in the gut of up to 3% of healthy adults, where it is kept in check by normal, 'good' bacteria. The gut can become imbalanced when a person takes antibiotics, allowing the 'bad' C.Diff to multiply and attack the walls of the gut. The result is severe diarrhoea. The risk of this occurring may increase for the following reasons:

- A patient has recently taken antibiotics
- A patient has undergone bowel surgery
- A patient is a regular user of health services
- A patient is in long term care (i.e. a care home)
- A patient is particularly vulnerable to infection for example, patients undergoing chemotherapy or organ transplant patients etc
- A patient is over 65 years of age

What are the symptoms?

*Clostridium difficile* causes diarrhoea (mild to severe) and, unusually, life-threatening inflammation of the intestines. Other symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain or tenderness.

How does it spread?

Although some people can be healthy carriers of C.Diff people are generally only infectious during episodes of diarrhoea. The bacteria form spores, which become widely distributed on surfaces such as toilets, floors, equipment and the immediate environment. It can then be spread from person to person via contaminated hands or, from the contaminated environment or equipment if they are not cleaned properly.

How is Clostridium Difficile diagnosed?

A stool sample of diarrhoea is tested for the presence of the C Diff toxins. These toxins can be present in the stool for long periods after a patient has stopped having diarrhoea. Therefore it is not necessary to send repeat samples to check for clearance of the toxins.

How can Clostridium Difficile be treated?

You will only need to be treated if you have symptoms. It can be treated by either stopping or changing some medication or with specific antibiotics.

However, it is estimated that 20-30% of patients treated for C. Diff. infection will have a repeat of their symptoms at a later date.
Infection Prevention & Control

Once the condition is suspected or diagnosed, you will be nursed in a side room. You will remain like this until you are discharged or you have had no diarrhoea for at least 48 hours. All staff and relatives providing care will wear gloves and aprons and wash their hands in soap and water. Cleaning of the environment and equipment is also very important and will be performed regularly.

How will this affect my visitors & relatives?

C. Diff is unlikely to affect healthy relatives or friends. Therefore, visitors can visit patients whilst in hospital and at home. Visitors should practice good hand hygiene by washing with soap and water to prevent them from spreading infections.

How can I prevent it happening to me or others?

The most important thing patients, relatives, staff and carers can do to prevent the spread of infection is to wash their hands, thoroughly with soap and water, especially before and after eating and using the toilet.

The alcohol based hand rubs are not effective against the Clostridium Difficile spores.

Everyone should avoid visiting relatives and friends in healthcare environments if you feel unwell or have recently had diarrhoea.

If you are in your own home

Whilst your diarrhoea symptoms are present please ensure.

Good hygiene is important, including hand washing using soap and water following using the toilet.

Ensure that the toilet seat lid is down prior to the toilet being flushed. Ensure that bathroom/toilet are kept clean at all times.

We would recommend that following cleaning with your usual cleaning products, you would use a bleach based product in the bathroom and toilet.

Please ensure that you keep you let your GP informed if your symptoms persists or get worse following completing your course of treatment.

Further Information

This leaflet only gives general information. If you require further details, please contact:

- Infection Prevention & Control Team
- Your GP
- Nursing Staff

Infection Prevention & Control Team Contact Details:

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