



17. *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) Fact Sheet for Patients & Visitors

Test results show you or the patient you're visiting is infected with the germ *Clostridium difficile*.

What is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*)?

Clostridium difficile (*C. difficile*) is a germ that causes diarrhea and can cause more serious illness like colitis (inflammation of the gut). *C. difficile* is one of the most common diarrheal infections in hospitals and long term care facilities in the developed world.

Who is at risk of getting *C. difficile* infection?

Those at risk include the elderly and people treated with antibiotics or cancer drugs. Treatment with antibiotics changes the normal levels of good bacteria found in the gut. Patients taking certain stomach medications are also at increased risk.

How do people get *C. difficile*?

C. difficile is found in stool. People can get infected when they swallow the germ, which can be found on the unwashed hands of healthcare workers and on surfaces contaminated with stool. A healthcare worker may pass the germ to the patient while providing direct care or the patient may touch surfaces contaminated with stool, and then touch their mouth without cleaning their hands.

People can also get *C. difficile* if taking certain antibiotics or cancer drugs for a long period. This may decrease the normal levels of 'good' germs in the gut, and allow *C. difficile* to grow and multiply.

What are symptoms of *C. difficile* disease?

Symptoms may include:

- Sudden onset of watery diarrhea (stool that takes the shape of the container holding it)
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Stomach pain/tenderness

How serious is *C. difficile*?

More commonly, the infection causes diarrhea. Diarrhea can lead to serious complications, including dehydration, especially in the elderly or anyone that is seriously ill. In rare cases, *C. difficile* can be fatal.

How is *C. difficile* treated?

For people with mild symptoms treatment may not be required. For severe cases medication and even surgery may be needed.

Why are Additional Precautions needed?

Additional Precautions are actions taken to stop *C. difficile* from spreading to others.



What are the Additional Precautions?

Some of the precautions may include:

- Placement in a private room if possible
- Placement of a sign on the door of the room/curtain around the cubicle to let everyone know what precautions are needed
- Gloves and gowns worn by staff when caring for the patient and when touching equipment or surfaces in the room
- Hands cleaned by everyone before ENTERING and LEAVING the patient room/space
- The patient wears clean clothes or clean cover AND cleans his/her hands (or assisted with this) if it is necessary to leave the room/space. Gloves and gown are not needed for the patient
- The patient may not visit other common areas of the facility, e.g., cafeteria
- Always speak with the nurse prior to taking the patient out of the room

What about Visitors?

Visitors are permitted. They must clean their hands on entry to the patient's room. Close contact with the patient is permitted. Hands must be cleaned before and immediately after exiting the room/space.

If you have *C. difficile* how can you help?

- Remind all staff and visitors to clean their hands
- Wash hands often, especially after using the bathroom
- Inform staff if you are have diarrhea **or** if your symptoms get better or worse

References

1. A Guide to the Elimination of *Clostridium difficile* in Healthcare Settings (2008) Association for Professionals in Infection Control. Available at: http://www.apic.org/Resource_/EliminationGuideForm/5de5d1c1-316a-4b5e-b9b4-c3fbeac1b53e/File/APIC-Cdiff-Elimination-Guide.pdf.
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3. Public Health Agency of Canada (2011, July) Fact Sheet - *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*). Available at: [Fact Sheet – Clostridium difficile \(C. difficile\) - Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
4. Routine Practices and Additional Precautions: Preventing the Transmission of Infection in Healthcare (2012) Manitoba Health. Available at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/docs/ipc/rpap.pdf>