



Clostridium Difficile, also known as “c.diff”

What is Clostridium Difficile?

Clostridium (klo-STRID-e-um) difficile (DIF-ih-sil), also known as “C. diff,” is a type of bacteria that can cause illness in people and animals. C. diff lives normally in soil, water, and sometimes inside a person’s intestines (bowels). It is unknown how long you can have C. diff in your body before becoming sick. Often you may not experience symptoms from C. diff because your body will protect you from the bacteria. However, older adults, babies, and people with other medical conditions may be more at risk for getting sick by the bacteria.

You are also more likely to get C. diff when you are taking antibiotics. Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infection. Everyone has good bacteria in their intestines. The good bacteria in your system keeps you healthy. Taking antibiotics can kill some of the good bacteria as well as the bad bacteria causing an infection. This allows the C. diff bacteria to take over and that is when you start feeling sick.

How is it spread?

The C. diff germ comes out in the bowel movement (stool). It can live on any surface where the stool may have come in contact. It can live a very long time (even years) on surfaces, even when those surfaces are cleaned. It is usually spread by hands that have touched items or surfaces with the C. diff bacteria, and then by touching the eyes, nose, or mouth.

What are the symptoms of the C. diff infection?

Signs and symptoms can start at different times for different people, but usually occur when someone is taking an antibiotic or shortly after finishing the antibiotic. You can experience:

- Abdominal (belly) pain or cramping
- A hard, swollen, tender belly
- Fever
- Severe (very bad) watery diarrhea. Sometimes up to 30 times a day. The diarrhea may have blood or mucus in it.
- Vomiting

How do I know if I have C. diff?

Your caregiver can test your stool for C. diff bacteria. You will need to get a small stool sample for testing. Sometimes several stool samples are needed to test. Other tests and special X-rays of your belly may be ordered by your caregiver.

How is C. diff treated?

Your caregiver may want you to stop taking your antibiotics if you are taking any, or they may switch you to something different. C. diff needs to be treated with special antibiotics. You will be given either metronidazole (met-ro-NIDE-ah-zohl) or Vancomycin (vane-koh-MY-sin), or a combination of both medicines. It is very important that you do not take any medications to slow down your bowels without asking your

doctor/caregiver first. Slowing down your bowels can make the C. diff bacteria stay inside your intestines longer and may make recovery more difficult.

Are special precautions needed in the hospital?

Patients in a hospital are on special precautions (isolation) called Contact Precautions— meaning, you are in a private room and people entering your room may need to wear gloves and a gown. You may be asked to stay inside of your room to prevent bacteria from spreading in the hallways or other areas. You will still be allowed to have visitors, but all visitors need to follow the same precautions and wash their hands before leaving your room. You may need special precautions until you no longer have this germ and no longer have any diarrhea.

What about home?

The most important thing you can do is wash your hands with soap and running water thoroughly and often. Wash for 20 seconds and rinse well. Dry your hands with fresh paper towels each time.

- Wash all heavily soiled bedding and clothing separately from other household laundry.
- Do not overload the washing machine and use the highest water level setting. Use regular laundry detergent and bleach when possible (for whites, etc.). Clothing is considered contaminated until it is washed as instructed above.
- There are no special precautions for dishes or silverware.
- You should continue to do these steps until you return to your normal bowel movement pattern.

It is a good idea to periodically disinfect tables, countertops or items that have been handled, with diluted household bleach (one tablespoon of bleach in one quart of water). Bleach solutions should be made fresh every day and stored in a closed container.

NOTE: Not all commercially prepared disinfectants contain bleach. Read the active ingredients carefully!

How YOU can help!

1. Ask your doctor or nurse any questions you might have.
2. Take all the medication your doctor prescribes, even if you are feeling better.
3. Make sure you wash your hands often and well.
4. Tell your caregiver/doctor if your diarrhea does not go away or it comes back after having normal bowel movement pattern.

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