

# **Clostridium difficile (C Diff)**

## **A guide for adult patients and their relatives**



This leaflet gives you information about Clostridium difficile (C Diff) and what can be done to prevent it spreading.

If you, your relatives or carers have any worries or concerns you should discuss this with the nursing staff, your doctor or the infection control nurse.

### **What is Clostridium difficile?**

Clostridium difficile 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 bacteria 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 gut 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 transplant patients etc
- A patient is over 65 years of age

Young children and babies are not at an increased risk.

### **What are the symptoms of C Diff infection?**

Some people have no symptoms and others have diarrhoea of varying severity and in some cases severe inflammation of the bowel.

### **C Diff is infectious**

A person with C Diff will be infectious during episodes of diarrhoea. The bacteria form spores, which become widely distributed on surfaces such as toilets, floors, equipment and the immediate environment around the patient.

The bacteria are spread on the hands of patients, visitors and staff from one person to another. This is known as “cross infection”.

When a person with C Diff stops having diarrhoea, the risk of cross infection to other people is greatly reduced. The diarrhoea may start again if they start another course of antibiotic treatment.

If you are taking antibiotics or medicine that may cause you to have diarrhoea they may be reviewed or stopped. It is sometimes necessary to give specific antibiotics to treat the infection.

### **Hand washing can reduce the spread of the infection**

C Diff is most commonly spread on the infected hands of carers, healthcare workers, visitors and patients. After any contact with someone who has diarrhoea, completing any task for the person with diarrhoea or using equipment the person with diarrhoea has used, everyone should always wash their hands with liquid soap and warm water and then dry them thoroughly. The person with diarrhoea **must** always be encouraged to wash their hands after using the toilet.

**Alcohol hand rubs will not prevent cross infection with C Diff**, as the spores are not killed by alcohol.

### **How is C Diff diagnosed?**

C Diff is diagnosed by sending a specimen to the laboratory for testing.

### **Infection control measures**

If a person with C Diff has diarrhoea then the following infection control measures must be taken to prevent ‘cross-infection’ of others. These include:

- Nurses/Doctors/Care staff wearing plastic gloves and aprons.
- Thorough daily cleaning of your room paying particular attention to all horizontal surfaces (door handles, bathroom/toilet facilities, windowsills etc.)
- Thorough cleaning of any shared equipment/facilities between patient/client use with warm water and detergent and then disinfected with a chlorine-based solution i.e. Milton
- Separate laundering of any clothes, linen or laundry. Laundry should be washed on the hottest wash the material will allow and as soon as possible.

If you are in a hospital or care home you may be cared for in a separate room or with other patients experiencing the same symptoms. You will have your own toilet or commode.

### Infected patients can still have visitors?

Visitors must be made aware of the need for hand washing before and after visiting. They do not need to wear gloves or aprons unless they are involved with your care.

### When will infection control measures stop?

Once you have had no diarrhoea for 48 hours and are having normal bowel motions. If the diarrhoea starts again, then infection control measures will be restarted.

### If I am in hospital, what do I do when I am discharged home from hospital?

If you are still taking the antibiotics finish the prescribed course. Wash hands with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and before eating. Clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas on a regular basis with household detergent. People in good health do not usually get C Diff so friends and relatives can visit.

## HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS

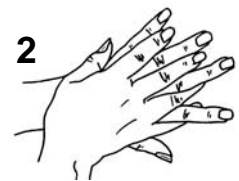
- **WET:** Its better to wet hands before applying soap as this prevents irritation
- **SOAP:** Apply soap to wet hands.
- **WASH:** Rub hands together vigorously making sure both sides of the hands are washed thoroughly, around the thumbs, between each finger and around and under the nails (using the six stage guide illustrated right).
- **RINSE:** Rinse with clean running water
- **DRY:** Germs spread more easily if hands are wet so dry them thoroughly.



### Six step technique demonstrating effective hand washing



1 Rub palms together



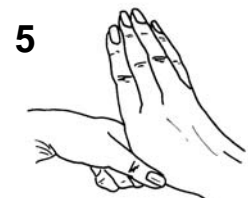
2 Rub each palm over the back of the other hand



3 Rub with fingers interlaced



4 Rub with fingers interlocked



5 Rotational rubbing of each thumb



6 Rotational rubbing with clasped fingers