

# Clostridium Difficile

## Fact Sheet

### What is Clostridium Difficile?

Commonly referred to as '**C. diff**', *Clostridium difficile* is a bacteria (germ) and is the most common cause of antibiotic-associated diarrhoea (AAD). Patients may experience watery, sometimes explosive diarrhoea, fever, nausea, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, or tenderness. Most patients with **C. diff** diarrhoea symptoms will resolve within 2-3 days of discontinuing the antibiotic to which the patient was previously exposed.

### What is the difference between infection and colonisation?

**Infection** means that bacteria (germs) are in or on the body and makes you sick, which results in signs and symptoms such as fever, nausea, abdominal pain, or diarrhoea.

**Colonisation** means you carry the bacteria in or on your body, but you do not become sick. People who are colonised will not have signs or symptoms. Colonised patients are sometimes given treatment to prevent infection developing.

Both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria (germs) to other patients.

### How did I acquire Clostridium Difficile?

**C. diff** can be spread by touching the skin with faecal particles of an infected or colonised person (Direct Contact), or by touching a surface (Indirect Contact) that has the bacteria (germs) on it, for example hospital beds, tables, shared equipment.

### Who is at risk from Clostridium Difficile infections?

- People who are having or have had antibiotics
- People who have had bowel surgery or manipulation
- People who have had a long length of stay in healthcare settings

- Anyone with a lowered immunity or long-term illness.
- The elderly (elderly patients may become seriously ill with dehydration because of the diarrhoea.)

### How will my care change whilst in hospital?

- You will be managed using special infection control precautions until at least 48 hours after your diarrhoea has stopped.
- Regular and thorough hand hygiene is one of the most successful ways to prevent the spread of ALL infections.
- A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use special protective infection control precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.
- The hospital staff will wear protective clothing such as gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room. These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin as the staff member leaves your room.
- You will be allocated a private room with your own en-suite facilities. We ask that your movement throughout the ward is limited to essential movement only, such as physiotherapy. If you are unsure about when you can leave your room, please speak to the nursing staff.

### Good Hand Hygiene Practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to learn and maintain good hand hygiene practices every day. Please refer to the hand hygiene information in the patient information booklet or hand hygiene leaflet available from the Infection prevention and control team. **The use of alcohol hand rubs is not recommended for C. diff.**

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### Can I still have visitors?

Yes – you can still have visitors. In general, exposure to **C. diff** does not cause infection in healthy people; this includes pregnant women, babies, and children. **Casual contact such as hugging, and kissing is OK.** Being diagnosed with **C. diff** does not prevent you from continuing sexual relations with your partner, unless otherwise advised by your doctor.

If a friend or relative wishes to visit who has had recent surgery, has an illness, or has a compromised immune system they may wish to contact the Infection Control staff or speak with their GP for further advice. To prevent the spread of **C. diff** the nursing staff will provide education to your visitors about the need to perform hand hygiene before and after they enter your room. We ask that you also encourage your visitors to do this. They should use both soap and water at the wall sink in the ward, **the use of alcohol hand rubs is not recommended for C. diff.**

### What happens when I go home?

- Once your diarrhoea has stopped the risk of infection is dramatically reduced.
- However, when you return home it is important for you, your family, and your friends to continue the good hand hygiene practices that you have been taught in hospital every day.
- If you are still experiencing episodes of diarrhoea then it is important that any family member or close contact wear gloves for the washing of clothes, linen, crockery, and cutlery or for the cleaning of the bath, toilet and shower.
- It is important that anyone assisting you with close personal care wears gloves if they are going to be in contact with any faeces, urine, wounds, or blood. They must wash their hands well, after removing their gloves and disposing of the gloves immediately in the rubbish bin.

### Where can I get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department, ask your nurse to contact us. Our office hours are 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Our contact numbers are (02) 9480 9433 or (02) 9480 9732.

### References

NSW Dept of Health; Infection Prevention and Control Policy 2017\_013

National Health and Medical Research Council; Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019)

South Australian Government, Dept of Health; Clostridium Difficile infection (CDI) - including symptoms, treatment and prevention (January 21, 2021)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Preventing the Spread of C. diff (Clostridioides difficile) (November 4, 2019)