

Clostridium difficile (*C. difficile*)



UHN

Information for patients and families

Read this resource to learn about:

- What is *C. difficile*
- How people get infected with *C. difficile*
- Treatment and medicine
- How to stop *C. difficile* from spreading



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What is *C. difficile*?

C. difficile is a bacterium or germ that creates a toxin (poison) that can cause swelling in the intestines.

If you get sick with *C. difficile* the most common symptoms are:

- diarrhea
- fever
- stomach pain

How did I get *C. difficile*?

C. difficile can be found in a person's stomach without causing them to get sick. Healthy people are usually not affected by *C. difficile*.

Taking certain antibiotics (medicine that fights infection) or having chemotherapy can make it easier for *C. difficile* to grow and cause infection.

C. difficile can live on objects for up to 30 days or more. It can spread by touching a person who has *C. difficile* or by touching an infected object and then touching your mouth. This is why hand washing is very important.

How does my health care team treat this?

If we think you have a *C. difficile* infection, we will ask you to give a stool sample for testing.

To stop *C. difficile* from spreading to other patients, we may ask everyone on your health care team and your visitors to follow special rules called **contact precautions**. Also, your doctor may order special medicine to treat your *C. difficile* infection.

How do we stop *C. difficile* from spreading in hospitals?

If we think you have *C. difficile* or if you have been tested and we are sure you have it, these are the precautions that may happen:

- You may be moved to a single room.
- Everyone entering your room must clean their hands, and then wear a gown and gloves.
- Patients with *C. difficile* are only allowed to leave their rooms if they have permission from the health care team.
- We may limit what you can do outside of your room, before eating, and after using the washroom.
- All equipment (for example, a walker) must be wiped down after using.

Why am I kept away from others if I have *C. difficile*?

C. difficile can spread easily in the hospital. Keeping you in your own room and away from others lowers the chance of *C. difficile* spreading to other patients.

How long will I be kept alone?

The diarrhea caused by a *C. difficile* infection usually stops several days after treatment. Keeping you away from others is usually only necessary while you are having diarrhea.

Can I pass on *C. difficile* to my family or friends?

Usually healthy people will not catch this infection. The best way for your family and friends to stay healthy is to wash their hands and follow the special precautions while they visit you in the hospital.

Will I have this infection for the rest of my life?

C. difficile can be treated successfully using special antibiotics.

When you are being treated for *C. difficile*, your symptoms (for example, diarrhea) will usually go away after a few days of taking your antibiotics. By the time you finish all the antibiotics and you do not have any more diarrhea the *C. difficile* is usually gone.

If you get infected with *C. difficile* again, you will be treated with specific antibiotics. This is why washing your hands often is so important.

Who is most likely to get *C. difficile*?

Some people have a higher chance of getting infected by *C. difficile*.

This includes any adult who:

- must be in the hospital for long periods
- are older
- use certain antibiotics
- have other serious illnesses, such as cancer

Children rarely get *C. difficile* infections. But, children who must spend a lot of time in the hospital because of serious illnesses are at risk.

What do I need to do when I get home?

You can go home and use the antibiotics to treat *C. difficile* if your diarrhea has stopped. Take the medicine that your doctor ordered **until it is finished**.

Once you are at home, hand washing is the most important thing that you can do, especially after you use the washroom and before you eat. Try not to share the toilet with another person until the *C. difficile* infection is gone. We know that this may not always be possible.

If you must share the toilet with others, wipe down the toilet seat with a disinfectant (such as Lysol) after each use. This will help to stop the spread of the infection to others.



If you finish your medicine and the diarrhea returns, it is important to go to your family doctor and make sure to tell them that you had *C.difficile* and were treated in the hospital.

Who can I talk to if I have more questions?

If you have questions or concerns about stopping infections:

- ask your nurse to call Infection Prevention and Control
- email us at InfectionControlUHN@uhn.ca