



TIMMINS AND DISTRICT HOSPITAL Infection Control

Clostridium difficile (*C. diff*)

Questions and Answers

What is *C. diff*?

C. diff is a harmful bacteria that can be found in feces. *C. diff* occurs when antibiotics kill your good bowel bacteria and allow the *C. diff* to grow and produce toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. *C. diff* disease is usually mild but sometimes can be severe, requiring surgery. In extreme cases, *C. diff* may cause death. It is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospitals and long-term care homes.

The main symptoms of *C. diff* are:

- Watery diarrhea
- Fever
- Abdominal pain or tenderness

Who Gets *C. diff*?

C. diff usually occurs during or after the use of antibiotics. Old age, presence of other serious illnesses, and poor overall health may increase the risk of severe disease.

How Will Your Doctor Know That You Have *C. diff*?

If you have symptoms of *C. diff*, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if *C. diff* toxins are present. You need to provide two samples on two different days to rule out *C. diff*.

How is *C. diff* Treated?

Treatment depends on how sick you are. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe disease, antibiotics are required.

How Does *C. diff* Spread?

When a person has *C. diff*, the bacteria in the stool can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, toilet flush handles, bedpans, or commode chairs. When touching these items, our hands can become contaminated. If we then touch our mouth without washing our hands, we can become infected. Our soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces and may make others sick.

How Do I Prevent the Spread?

If you are in the hospital and have *C. diff*, you will be put on contact precautions until you are free from diarrhea for at least two days. Your activities outside the room may be restricted. All health care staff who enter your room wear a gown, mask, and gloves. Everyone **MUST** clean their hands when leaving your room. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom.

Cleaning hands is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of *C. diff*. As well, a thorough cleaning of your room and equipment will be done to prevent spread of the infection.

What Should I Do at Home?

Healthy people like your family and friends who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting *C. diff* disease. Proper hygiene will prevent the spread and risk to others.

Hand hygiene - Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds:

- After using the toilet
- After touching dirty surfaces
- Before eating
- Before preparing meals

Cleaning the house - Use an all purpose household cleaner or diluted bleach. Follow the directions on the label, and:

- Wet the surface well and clean using good friction
- Allow the surface to air dry
- Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with feces such as the toilet and sink. Remove any visible feces, and then clean as described above.

Cleaning clothes/other fabric - Wash clothes/fabric separately if they are heavily soiled with feces:

- Rinse off feces
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- Dry items in the dryer on high heat, if possible
- Dry clean where appropriate

Cleaning dishes - Regular cleaning – use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water.

It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should not use any drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium). If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor

Additional questions?

Contact Infection Control at Ext# 2847

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