



Blackrock Clinic

CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

*Information and  
Advice for Patients  
and Visitors*

## What is Clostridium difficile?

- Clostridium difficile, also known as 'C. difficile' and 'C. diff' is a bacteria (germ) that normally lives in your large intestine (gut/bowel).
- A small proportion (less than 1 in 20) of the healthy adult population carry a small amount of Clostridium difficile and don't experience any problem with it. It is kept in check by the normal, 'good' bacteria of the intestine.
- However, when you take an antibiotic, some of the 'good' bacteria die causing the Clostridium difficile bacteria to multiply and you may get an infection in your large intestine.

## What are the symptoms of Clostridium difficile?

- If you become infected with Clostridium difficile you may get diarrhoea, which has a very unpleasant smell.
- You may also suffer from stomach cramps, fever, nausea and loss of appetite.
- Most people only get mildly ill and recover fully from it.
- However, in certain circumstances you may get seriously ill and develop colitis (inflammation of the bowel). Early diagnosis can avoid this. If the colitis is severe it can be life threatening.

## How is Clostridium difficile diagnosed?

- A sample of diarrhoea is sent to the laboratory for testing. Staff in the laboratory test for Clostridium difficile bacteria in the diarrhoea.

## Is Clostridium difficile contagious?

- Yes, it is. If you have Clostridium difficile diarrhoea, the Clostridium difficile bacteria can survive on your hands and surfaces for a long time unless they are washed. It can then pass from your hands and surfaces to others through unwashed hands and soiled equipment.
- To prevent Clostridium difficile from spreading, you, your family members and hospital staff need to regularly wash your hands and clean and disinfect equipment. (see Hand Hygiene leaflet).

## **Who is most likely to get Clostridium difficile diarrhoea?**

You are most at risk of developing infection if you:

- Are taking or have recently finished taking antibiotics.
- Have spent a long time in hospital or other healthcare settings (e.g., nursing homes).
- Are older.
- Have a serious illness.
- Have a weakened immunity (e.g., receiving cancer treatment).
- Have had bowel surgery.

## **What treatment will I get if I have Clostridium difficile diarrhoea?**

- In some cases, certain antibiotics may have caused the diarrhoea so you may have to stop taking them.
- You may be given other antibiotics which are effective against the Clostridium difficile bacteria.
- It is important to drink enough fluids so that you don't become dehydrated because of the diarrhoea.

## **What happens if I have Clostridium difficile diarrhoea while I'm in hospital?**

- You will be moved to a single room with en suite facility for your own use.
- You must make sure to wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before meals.
- Staff looking after you will wear aprons and gloves and wash their hands after caring for you.

Remember; Alcohol gel does not kill Clostridium difficile spores.

## **Can I have visitors if I am infected with Clostridium difficile?**

- Yes, you can have visitors as healthy people are at very little risk of getting Clostridium difficile unless they are taking antibiotics. If you have any concerns about someone visiting, please seek advice from nursing staff first.

- Your visitors will be asked to report to the nurse in charge before visiting you.
- Ask your visitors to wash their hands with soap and water before and after visiting you.
- Your visitors will need to wear gloves and aprons if they are helping with your personal care.
- Your visitors should sit on the chairs provided, not on your bed and only use the public toilets.

### **Will any of my treatment be delayed because I have Clostridium difficile diarrhoea?**

- Your tests or treatment should continue as planned, with staff taking the correct precautions to prevent Clostridium difficile spreading.
- Some non-urgent tests may be delayed if you have severe diarrhoea until it subsides.

### **How will I know when the Clostridium difficile is no longer infectious?**

- Once the diarrhoea has stopped for at least 48 hours and your bowel motion is back to normal you are on the mend.
- However, Clostridium difficile bacteria may remain in your bowel for sometime afterwards and the diarrhoea may return requiring further treatment.

### **Can I go home with Clostridium difficile diarrhoea?**

You should normally wait until the diarrhoea has settled and your doctor is satisfied that you are fit to go home. Your doctor will let you know if you need to continue treatment at home.

### **Can Clostridium difficile diarrhoea come back?**

Yes. Some patients may suffer a relapse of diarrhoea. Please contact your GP/ family doctor if you develop diarrhoea after you are discharged from hospital and let him/ her know that you had Clostridium difficile recently. If you need antibiotics for another illness please tell your GP/family doctor that you recently had Clostridium difficile.

*continued overleaf >*

## To reduce the risk of spreading *Clostridium difficile* to others, take the following steps:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry them after using the bathroom and before eating.
- Be strict with your personal hygiene – do not share personal items such as towels and face cloths.
- Machine wash soiled laundry separately from other washing on the hottest wash cycle suitable for linen and clothing.
- Tell your family or carers to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water and dry them after caring for you.
- Try to avoid using the same toilet that your family members use ( if possible). If this is not possible, ensure that the toilet is cleaned and disinfected after your use.
- Clean surfaces in bathrooms on a daily basis with household detergents. If you have had diarrhoea, then disinfect with a mixture of bleach and water as instructed on the container. Pay special attention to 'touch' areas, such as sink taps, flush handle, toilet seats and lastly the toilet bowl.

### More Information

All staff in Blackrock Clinic are trained in standard precautions and hand washing technique and would be delighted to answer any questions that you may have in relation to this. They may also direct you to the nearest hand washing facility and show you how to wash your hands correctly.

For further information please contact the infection control team in Blackrock Clinic.

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## *How to wash your hands*



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