What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile, also known as C. difficile, is a bacteria.

It is known that many people can carry C. difficile in their large intestine and it will not cause any problems. Your large intestine is often called your bowels.

Sometimes, C. difficile can cause an infection in your large intestines. This often happens when taking lots of antibiotics.

What are the symptoms of a C. difficile infection?

Symptoms may include:

- watery diarrhea
- fever
- abdominal pain or tenderness

How is C. difficile treated?

C. difficile is usually treated by stopping the current antibiotic. You will be started on a new antibiotic. This antibiotic is specific in working against C. difficile. The antibiotic is taken by mouth.

How did I get C. difficile?

C. difficile can be a part of the normal bacteria that live in the large intestine. Taking certain antibiotics can change the balance of bacteria and make it easier for C. difficile to grow and cause an infection. It can be spread by touching people who have it or by handling things that they have used.

The risk of getting C. difficile increases in the elderly, those who are very weak and those patients who are taking a lot of antibiotics.
What happens if I have *C. difficile*?

If you are found to have *C. difficile* you will have a room of your own or share a room with someone who also has it. This is to protect you and to help prevent the spread of the bacteria which causes *C. difficile*. While in the hospital you will be in Contact Precautions.

What are Contact Precautions?

Contact Precautions help reduce the risk of spreading infections to patients, visitors and staff.

- A sign is put on your door to let staff and visitors know that you are in Contact Precautions.
- People entering your room must wear a gown and gloves. Supplies are stored outside your room.
- Everyone helping you with personal care must wear a gown and gloves.
- Before leaving your room, everyone must take off their gown and gloves and wash their hands.
- You have to stay in your room unless you need to go for a test or x-ray. If you need to leave, a staff member will help you get ready. You will need to wear a clean patient gown or clean clothing.
- Do not go to common areas such as the ward kitchen, hospital café or other patient rooms.
- **Wash hands well and often.** Use soap and water or the waterless hand rinse that is placed in your room and outside the doorway.

Can I give this to visitors while in the hospital?

Healthy people who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting diarrhea from *C. difficile*. **The best protection for them, against even a small risk, is to wash their hands after visiting you.**

How long will it take for the *C. difficile* to go away?

This is hard to predict. Sometimes, depending on your health, it will go away in a few weeks, or it could take months.
Will the C. difficile come back?

In approximately 20 – 30 % of cases, C. difficile can come back. If you develop recurrent symptoms (diarrhea, fever and/or abdominal pain) following the treatment for C. difficile or while on treatment for C. difficile, return to the hospital Emergency Department or contact your doctor immediately to prevent severe complication related to the infection. Inform the physician that you recently had C. difficile infection.

Going home with C. difficile

Wash your hands

When you go home with C. difficile. Continue to wash your hands well:

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

Do I need to use special soap at home?

No. Washing with regular soap is fine. A liquid handsoap with a pump is the best for getting rid of bacteria from your hands.

My spouse is sick at home, can he/she get this?

There is a slight chance of spreading C. difficile to your spouse. Wash your hands well before and after contact with each other.

Will having a C. difficile affect my activities at home?

No. You can visit with friends, family, babies and children. If the baby or child is sick, delay the visit until he or she is well. The most important thing you must do is wash your hands well before and after contact. It is okay to kiss and hug babies and children.

All visitors and household members should wash their hands before and after contact.

You can go shopping. You can resume sexual activities. Do not share personal care items.
If someone helps me with my direct care, do they need to wear gown and gloves?

C. difficile is in your bowel movements. If you need help in cleaning up after a bowel movement or having diarrhea, the person helping you needs to wear gloves and to cover up their clothes to prevent soiling.

Do I need to eat a special diet at home?

It is important to eat a well-balanced diet. If you have been on antibiotics for a while, your large intestine will have lost many of the normal bacteria that grow there that help to keep you healthy. To learn more about healthy eating, Canada’s Food Guide is available online:


Do I need to wash my clothes separately?

Most clothes can be washed with household laundry detergent on a regular cycle. Bacteria are killed during the regular laundry process. If your clothes are heavily soiled with body fluids, like stool or urine, wash them separately:

- Rinse off the stool and urine.
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- Dry items in the dryer on high heat
- Dry clean where appropriate

Are there special instructions for house cleaning?

Keep a regular cleaning schedule with routine household products. Cleaning products can be bought from any grocery store. The most important rooms to keep clean are the bathroom and the kitchen. If you are not able to do any cleaning, you will need to inform the people who plan your care when you return home. Tips for cleaning:

- 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 stool such as the toilet and sink. Remove any stool, and then clean as described above.

Do I need to wash my dishes separately?

No. Dishes can be washed by hand with soap and water or in a dishwasher.

This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control, your physician or health care worker.