Antibiotic Associated Diarrhea Fact Sheet for Patients and Families

Taking oral or intravenous antibiotic medication may cause diarrhea in 20% to 40% of people. Often this type of diarrhea is mild and goes away when you finish taking the antibiotic medication. However, some people get a more serious type of diarrhea from a germ called Clostridium difficile or C. difficile.

Normally, you have some germs in your gut or intestines. Some antibiotic medications can destroy these germs allowing C. difficile to grow. C. difficile is a bacteria that causes diarrhea and can lead to serious problems such as dehydration and inflammation of the bowel. The most common way C. difficile is spread is by touching fecal or bowel material (stool) then touching a mouth. This is called fecal to oral contact.

How can I prevent C. difficile infection?

- Clean your hands often with hand sanitizer. Clean your hands after using a washroom, touching any surface, and before eating or drinking. Follow these guidelines even when your hands look clean.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water when they are soiled.
- If you have taken antibiotic medication, talk to your health care provider. Eating 1 serving of yogurt 2 times a day for 7 days after the last dose of antibiotic may help prevent C. difficile. You need to be sure that yogurt is allowed on your diet.
- At home, clean your toilet and washroom floor with a solution of 1 part household bleach mixed with 10 parts of tap water when you can.

What are the symptoms of C. difficile infection?

- watery diarrhea that may contain mucus and/or blood
- pain or cramps in your abdomen or tummy
- loss of appetite, nausea and/or weight loss
- fever
- fatigue – feeling very tired

When to talk to your doctor or health care provider:

- Tell your doctor or health care provider right away if you have severe and/or bloody diarrhea, abdominal (tummy) pain or fever.
- Tell your doctor or health care provider when you have recently taken antibiotic medication. Avoid taking anti-diarrheal medication until you talk to your doctor or health care provider.
- Tell your doctor or health care provider right away if you have diarrhea that continues after you finish taking antibiotic medication.
- Tell your doctor or health care provider right away if you have diarrhea that starts after you finish taking antibiotic medication.