

## ***Clostridium difficile* (C. diff)**

### *What you need to know*

*This handout describes Clostridium difficile and who is at risk for getting it. It also explains how this disease can be spread and how to keep others from getting it.*

### **What is *Clostridium difficile*?**

*Clostridium difficile* (klo-STRID-ee-um dif-uh-SEEL) is a germ that affects the intestines. You may also hear it called *C. diff*. It causes diarrhea, cramps, and more serious conditions such as *colitis* (inflammation of the inner lining of the colon).

People in good health usually don't get *C. diff* disease. You are more likely to get it if you:

- Are elderly
- Are a patient in the hospital
- Have been taking antibiotics for other illnesses or conditions

### **How is *C. diff* spread?**

The *C. diff* germ is found in the stool (*feces*). It can be spread in different ways:

- You can become infected if you touch objects or surfaces that are contaminated and then touch your mouth, nose, or urinary tract.
- You can spread the germ to others or to surfaces if you do not wash your hands with soap and water after being in contact with someone who has *C. diff* or after going to the bathroom.



*It is important to wash your hands with soap and water to keep from spreading *C. diff*.*

### **What are the symptoms?**

The *C. diff* germ gives off a toxin inside the body. People with *C. diff* infection usually have:



To learn more about *Clostridium difficile*, visit [www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/cdiff/Cdiff-patient.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/cdiff/Cdiff-patient.html).

- Watery diarrhea
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain or tenderness

### **How is *C. diff* diagnosed?**

A stool sample is usually sent to the lab to test for *C. diff*.

### **How is it treated?**

Most times, antibiotics are used to treat the infection.

### **How can we protect others from *C. diff* at home?**

It is important to keep your home environment clean. Follow these safety precautions to reduce the chance of spreading *C. diff*:

- **Wash your hands** with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
- **Scrub surfaces** in bathrooms, kitchens, and other areas regularly with household detergent and disinfectants. The *C. diff* germ spreads because it forms spores that are not killed by regular disinfection. It is important to scrub away the germ.

### **How are others protected at UWMC?**

At University of Washington Medical Center, we:

- Place a “Contact Enteric Precautions” sign near the door of rooms of patients who have *C. diff*. (*Enteric* means relating to the intestines.) This sign alerts healthcare workers and visitors to follow extra precautions around the patient and when touching items in their room.
- Healthcare providers and visitors are instructed to wash their hands with soap and water. Soap and water work better than using hand gel to get rid of the *C. diff* germ.

### **What can I expect if I am in contact enteric precautions?**

*Contact enteric precautions* are taken to prevent infections that spread through stool and vomit. While you are in contact enteric precautions:

- Healthcare workers will wear gowns and gloves when caring for you.
- We will make sure your room is kept clean.



*Hospital staff take special care to avoid spreading *C. diff*.*

- We will instruct healthcare workers and visitors to wash their hands with soap and water.
- You will be asked to stay in your room unless you need to go to other departments in the hospital for treatment.
- If you go to other departments for tests or treatments, we will ask you to wash your hands and to wear a gown and gloves on the way there.
- Please do not use the nutrition rooms. When you want a snack or water, ask a member of your healthcare team to bring it to you.

### **When can these precautions be stopped?**

Precautions may be stopped:

- When you no longer have diarrhea, you are feeling better, and a follow-up stool sample shows that you are no longer infected.
- If you no longer have symptoms after taking a full course of antibiotics.

If you have taken a full course of antibiotics and you still have diarrhea, another stool sample will be sent to the lab to check for *C. diff*.

### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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