

***Clostridioides difficile* (C. diff) Infection**

Clostridioides difficile (C. diff) is a germ that lives in the digestive tract (stomach and intestines or bowel). C. diff can make toxins that cause diarrhea.

Symptoms of C. diff

- Watery diarrhea
- Belly pain/tenderness
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea

Patients Most Likely to Get a C. diff Infection

People who need to use antibiotics and the elderly are most likely to get sick with C. diff. The germs in the stool can spread to surfaces, such as toilets, handles, bedpans, commode chairs, bedding, and medical equipment. When patients, family members, and health care workers touch these objects, the C. diff gets on their hands or body. If a person ingests (eats) the germ from their unwashed hands, C. diff can cause an infection.

Treatment for C. diff

There are antibiotics that can be used to treat C. diff. In very bad cases, a person may need surgery to remove the infected part of their bowel. This surgery is needed in only 1 or 2 out of every 100 persons with C. diff infection.

Preventing the Spread of C. diff in Hospitals and Clinics

Doctors, nurses, and other health care workers:

- Wash their hands with soap and water before and after they care for each patient.
- Clean rooms and equipment that have been used for patients who have

C. diff infections with bleach or other disinfectant that kills C. diff.

- Use **enhanced contact precautions** to prevent the spread of C. diff from person to person. This means wearing a gown and gloves before entering the patient's room.

Safety Precautions When a C. diff Patient Is in the Hospital

- Patients are in private rooms and stay in their room as much as they can. Patients **do not** go into common areas. They can go to areas for tests and treatments.
- Health care workers and visitors will wear gowns and gloves when entering patient rooms. Nurses will teach visitors the right way to put on a gown and gloves.
- Before anyone leaves the room, gowns and gloves are removed and hands are washed with soap and water.

How You Can Help Prevent the Spread of C. diff in the Health System

- Doctors, nurses, and other health care workers should clean and wash with soap and water after they care for you.
- Remind visitors to wear a gown and gloves. They should wash their hands with soap and water as they come and go.
- Wash your hands often. Wash after you use the bathroom and before you touch food.
- **Do not** actively seek antibiotics for common, often viral infections (head cold). Only take antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor.

- Stay in your room except when you need to go for a test or procedure.
- Before leaving your room, put on a clean robe. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Keep the robe on while you are outside your room.

At Home with C. diff

When you are at home, you can follow your normal routine. There are a few things you should do to decrease the chance of having C. diff infection again and spreading it to others.

- If you are given medicine to treat C. diff, take it as directed.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often. Wash after you go to the bathroom and before you touch food.
- People who live with you should also wash their hands with soap and water often.
- Remind visitors to wash their hands with soap and water as they come and go.
- If you are able, make one bathroom in your house for your use only. Clean the bathroom (including light switches, doorknobs, and faucet handles) with a 1:10 bleach solution (1 cup bleach, 9 cups water).
- When you wash objects or clothing that have stool on them, first rinse them in water. Then wash them in hot water with soap. If you are able, add some bleach to the water to help kill the germs. Dry objects on the hottest setting that will not damage them.
- If you begin to have diarrhea or if your diarrhea gets worse, tell your doctor right away.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint Health-Meriter, Swedish American, or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7219