



Patient Education Sheet

What is C-Difficile?

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C-difficile or “C-diff” is an abbreviation for *Clostridium difficile* (Klo-STRID-ee-um dif-uh-SEEL). This is a germ that causes diarrhea and sometimes inflammation of the colon.

Illness from *C. difficile* most commonly occurs after use of antibiotic medications. Those who are more at risk to get C-difficile include the elderly and people with chronic diseases or a weakened immune system.

When you take an antibiotic to treat an infection, the drug can destroy some of the normal, helpful bacteria as well as the bacteria causing the illness. Without enough healthy bacteria, *C. difficile* can quickly grow out of control. The antibiotics that most often lead to *C. difficile* infections include fluoroquinolones, cephalosporins, clindamycin and penicillins.

How is C-difficile spread?

C-difficile spores can live outside the body for a very long time and may be found on surfaces in the environment, such as bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, and medical equipment. It can be spread from person to person on contaminated equipment, and on the hands of other people who do not wash their hands well enough.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of *C-difficile* may include:

- Watery diarrhea, which could be as frequent as 10 to 15 times per day
- Abdominal cramping and pain, which could be severe
- Fever
- Blood and/or pus in bowel movements

- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Dehydration

How is C-difficile treated?

There are other antibiotics that are used to treat *C-difficile*. In severe cases, surgery may be needed to remove the infected section of the intestines.

What is the hospital doing to prevent the spread of C-difficile infections?

To prevent the spread of *C-difficile*, our doctors, nurses, and other members of the healthcare team:

- Clean their hands with soap and water before and after caring for every patient. This helps to prevent the spread from person to person
- Carefully clean hospital rooms and medical equipment that have been used for patients with *C-difficile*
- Only give patients antibiotics when it is necessary
- Use contact precautions to prevent *C-difficile* from spreading to other patients

What are contact precautions?

Contact precautions means that whenever possible, patients with *C-difficile* will be put in a private room or will share a room with another patient with *C-difficile*. The healthcare team will put on gowns and gloves over their clothes when entering the

room and they will take them off and wash their hands when leaving the room. Visitors will also be asked to put on gowns and gloves.

Patients on contact precautions are asked to stay in their rooms as much as possible. Also, they and their families are asked not to visit common areas, such as the nutrition area on the unit to prevent the spread of C-difficile to other patients.

Can my family and friends still visit me in the hospital?

C-difficile usually does not occur in healthy people who are not taking antibiotics. Visitors are not likely to get C-difficile. However, visitors are still asked to put on gowns and gloves to make it safer for them and to prevent the person to person spread of infection.

What can I do to prevent the spread of C-difficile?

If you do not see any member of the healthcare team wash his/her hands, please ask them to do so before and after caring for you.

- Only take antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor.
- Wash your own hands with soap and water often, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
- Remind people who live with you to wash their hands frequently as well.
- If you are given a prescription to treat C-difficile, take the medicine exactly as prescribed and make sure you finish all of the medication.
- If you develop more diarrhea when you go home, tell your doctor right away.

If you have further questions regarding C-difficile, please ask your doctor or nurse.

Sources:

The Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America. *FAQ's about Clostridium Difficile*. Retrieved from www.shea-online.org

The Mayo Clinic. C-difficile symptoms. Retrieved from the Mayo Clinic at www.mayoclinic.com

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