

# Fact Sheet

## CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

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### What is Clostridium Difficile (C. diff)?

C. diff is one of the many bacteria that can be found in feces. C. diff disease occurs when antibiotics kill your good bowel bacteria and allow the C. diff to grow. When C. diff grows, it produces substances (toxins). These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. C. diff is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospital.

### How do people get C. diff disease?

C. diff disease usually occurs during or after the use of antibiotics. Old age, presence of other serious illnesses and poor overall health may increase the risk of severe disease. Healthy people who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting C. diff disease.

### What are the symptoms of C. diff disease?

The main symptoms of C. diff disease are: watery diarrhea, fever and abdominal pain or tenderness. If you have symptoms of C. diff, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if C. diff toxins are present.

### How does C. diff spread?

When a person has C. diff disease the bacteria in the feces can pass from surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans, or commode chairs to our bodies. When touching these items your hands can become soiled. If you then touch your mouth, you can swallow the C. diff bacteria. Soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces.

### How is C. diff treated?

Treatment depends on how sick you are with the disease. C. diff disease is usually mild but sometimes can be severe. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe disease, an antibiotic is given. In severe cases, surgery may be needed and in extreme cases C. diff may cause death.

It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should not use any drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g., Imodium). **If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor.**

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## **What is being done to prevent spread of C. diff in the hospital?**

If you have C. diff diarrhea, you will be moved to a private room until you are free from diarrhea for at least 2 days. Your activities outside the room will be restricted and people entering your room will wear gloves and may wear a gown. Visitors and staff **MUST** clean their hands when leaving your room. A thorough cleaning of your room and equipment will be done to remove any bacteria. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom.

**Cleaning hands is the most important way to prevent the spread of C. diff bacteria.**

## **What should I do at home?**

### **Hand care**

Wash your hands for 15 seconds:

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

### **Cleaning the house**

Use either a household cleaner diluted according to the instructions or diluted household bleach:

- 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 feces ,such as the toilet and sink
- If you see feces remove first and then clean as described above

### **Cleaning clothes/other fabric**

Wash clothes/fabric separately if they are heavily soiled with feces:

- Rinse stool off
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- Dry items in the dryer if possible

### **Cleaning dishes**

- Regular cleaning, you can use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water

For more information contact Toronto Public Health at 416-338-7600 or visit [toronto.ca/health](http://toronto.ca/health)

This fact sheet has been developed using the materials, from the Ottawa Hospital, contained in the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee Best Practices Document for Management of Clostridium difficile in all Health Care Settings, May 2010 available at [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/pidac/pidac\\_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/infectious/pidac/pidac_mn.html).