

# *Clostridium difficile*

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

*Clostridium difficile*, often called *C. difficile* or *C. diff*, is a germ that can cause symptoms that range from diarrhea to life-threatening colon inflammation.

## **What are the symptoms of *C. diff* infection?**

Common symptoms include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Belly pain and cramping

## **What is the difference between being colonized and being infected with *C. diff*?**

Being colonized means that a person has *C. diff* germs in their body, but does not show symptoms. Being infected means that a person has *C. diff* germs in their body and does show symptoms.

## **How do people get *C. diff* infections?**

*C. diff* germs are found in feces, which is why good handwashing is so important after using the bathroom. People can become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are dirty with *C. diff* germs and then touch their mouth. These germs can live outside the body for a long time.

*C. diff* infection most often happens in people who have recently taken antibiotics and have had recent admissions to a healthcare facility, such as a hospital or nursing home. However, it is becoming more common for people to get *C. diff* infection without having a recent hospitalization or nursing home stay. These infections are called community-associated *C. diff* infections. These people often have recently taken antibiotics.

## **Who is most likely to get *C. diff* infection?**

People most likely to get an infection are:

- People over the age of 65 years
- People who have recently taken antibiotics
- People with other serious illnesses

## **Can *C. diff* infections be treated?**

Yes, there are antibiotics that can be used to treat *C. diff* infections when a person is experiencing symptoms.

## **How can people prevent the spread of *C. diff*?**

Washing your hands with soap and water regularly is the best way to prevent any illness. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom and before preparing food or eating.

Regularly clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens, and other high use areas of the house using standard household detergents or bleach-containing household cleaners.

## What should I know about *C. diff* in children?

Infants are often colonized early in life and can carry *C. diff* until age three years without symptoms.

- Children younger than one year of age should not be tested for *C. diff*.
- In children ages one to three years, other causes of diarrhea should be considered before testing for *C. diff*.

### School-aged children:

Students infected with *C. diff* do not need to be kept home from school unless they're unable to contain their diarrhea.

### Children in day care/child care:

Infected children should stay home from day care until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped.

- You do not need to notify parents, other teachers, or the health department about a child who has *C. diff*.
- Infected children can use public restrooms.
- Children should always wash hands carefully with soap and water after using the restroom. Young children may need help with handwashing to prevent spread of the infection.
- Wear gloves when changing the diapers of children with *C. diff* infection and disinfect the changing area after each change.
- Clean up accidents and bathrooms with a sporicidal product, a product that can kill the *C. diff* germs, like bleach.

## When can I return to work after *C. diff* infection?

- You can return to work as soon as you feel ready, or after your diarrhea has stopped.
- Healthcare workers should wait 24 to 48 hours after their diarrhea stops before returning to work or until stooling has returned to normal consistency for individuals with IBS, IBD or colostomies or ileostomies.
- Remember to wash your hands frequently, and always after using the bathroom and before eating.

## Be smart about antibiotics.

Most cases of *C. diff* occur in patients taking antibiotics. Good use of antibiotics can help prevent the spread of *C. diff*.

- Antibiotics only work on bacteria; they will not treat an illness caused by a virus, like the flu or a cold.
- Trust your provider's recommendation on if you need an antibiotic; do not demand an antibiotic prescription.
- Never share antibiotics with others.
- If your provider prescribes you antibiotics, always finish the entire prescription unless your provider tells you to stop.
- Do not save antibiotics for later use.
- If you develop diarrhea while taking antibiotics, contact your healthcare provider.

**IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, PLEASE SPEAK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER.**

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07/24/2019