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Clostridium difficile



**If you have any further questions,
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This leaflet contains information about Clostridium difficile
- what it is and how it affects people

1 What is Clostridium *difficile*?

Clostridium *difficile* are bacteria in the bowel that cause disease by producing toxins (poisons).

2 Who gets Clostridium *difficile*?

Clostridium *difficile* is mostly found in people who are unwell, but it also exists in the gut of a small number of healthy adults. Elderly patients with other underlying diseases are most at risk. However, infection can occur in anyone who has:

- been treated with antibiotics
- undergone gastrointestinal surgery/manipulation
- had a long stay in a hospital or nursing home
- an immune system which is not working properly

3 How do you get Clostridium *difficile*?

Clostridium *difficile* produces spores that can live in the environment for a long time. Any surface, piece of equipment, furniture or furnishing can harbour the spores. The risk of cross-infection increases when patients have diarrhoea and bathrooms and toilets are shared. Antibiotics increase the risk of infection.

4 How do you avoid getting Clostridium *difficile*?

- Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water
 - before preparing and eating food
 - after handling raw food
 - after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
 - after visiting hospitals and care homes
- Taking antibiotics only when necessary
- If someone has clostridium, wash all dirty clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle possible. Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water
- Do not share towels

5 What are the symptoms of Clostridium *difficile*?

These include mild to moderate diarrhoea; stomach cramps/tenderness; fever; loss of appetite; nausea. Some cases are more serious.

If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647, visit their website <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>, or see your family doctor.

6 What is the treatment for Clostridium *difficile*?

Drink plenty of fluids, as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution. If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid, frequently. Avoid tea, coffee, carbonated drinks or alcohol.

Clostridium *difficile* colitis is usually treated with specific antibiotics. Once the diarrhoea stops it indicates the infection has gone. Clostridium *difficile* infection may recur. If this happens, patients should tell their GP that they have it.

7 Do patients who have had Clostridium *difficile* in hospital need special care once they have returned home?

People who have had Clostridium *difficile* colitis in hospital do not need special care once they return home. The symptoms of diarrhoea should have gone or their bowels should have started working normally 48 hours before they are discharged from hospital. Those returning to a care home need special precautions if they get ill with diarrhoea again.

8 Are there any complications?

In severe cases, patients can suffer ulceration and bleeding from the colon (colitis). At worst the intestine tears, so that the spaces in the surrounding abdomen become infected. Although rare, this can be fatal.

9 Do I need to stay off work or school?

Clostridium *difficile* infection is unusual in school age children and young adults. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You should not return to work or school until you have been free from diarrhoea for 48 hours. If you work with vulnerable groups such as those in care homes, you need to inform your employer.

10 The Health Protection Agency and Clostridium *difficile*

More information about the Health Protection Agency and Clostridium *difficile* is available on our website at <http://www.hpa.org.uk>.