

What kind of infection is it?

Often called "C. diff", Clostridium difficile is a bacterial infection that causes diarrhea and intestinal inflammation when it overwhelms the normal bacteria in the intestines.

How do people get infected?

- *C. diff* is different from many other infections in that it usually requires two steps to cause illness. First, one has to get the bacteria into the intestine but that alone does not usually cause symptoms. *C. diff* usually gets into the intestines from exposure in hospitals or other healthcare settings but some people acquire the bacteria in the community.
- People can carry the bacteria in their intestines without symptoms. Many healthy babies younger than 2 years of age carry *C. diff* but it rarely makes them sick.
- Illness usually only develops when a person then takes antibiotics. The antibiotics destroy most of the other bacteria that normally live in the intestines and *C. diff* takes over, causing illness.
- Children younger than 5 years old may test positive for *C. diff* without having any illness, especially very young children. Children younger than 2 years old often test positive for *C. diff* but it is unlikely to be the cause of illness in this age group.

What are the usual symptoms?

- Illness usually starts 2-4 days after exposure.
- Diarrhea, stomach pain or cramps, headache, and fever.
- Diarrhea can be bloody.

How long does it last?

- Typically 5-7 days.

How is it treated?

- Prevent dehydration by drinking fluids. Most people will recover without treatment. Warning signs of dehydration include dry mouth, decreased urination, or dizziness.
- Certain types of antibiotics can shorten the illness. Your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic if your illness is more severe or is continuing. Take the antibiotic exactly as instructed.

Are there possible complications?

- Infection of the blood stream can occur in infants and people with weakened immune systems.
- Rare complications include certain types of arthritis (swelling and pain in the joints), or Guillain-Barré syndrome, which causes severe muscle weakness and paralysis.

Comments:

- Campylobacter can be avoided by washing hands with soap and water after handling raw poultry, washing cutting boards with soap and water after contact with raw poultry, not letting fruits or vegetables contact the juices of raw poultry and cooking poultry thoroughly.
- Wash hands carefully after cleaning up dog or cat droppings, especially diarrhea.
- Do not drink unpasteurized (raw) milk or untreated water from streams or ponds.
- People with diarrhea should not prepare food.

Resources:

- [CDC Handout](#)