C. diff: (Clostridium difficile)

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium [klo-STRID-ee-uh m] difficile [dif-i-seel] is an infection often referred to as “C. diff.” It typically affects patients who are taking antibiotics. The most common symptoms of C. difficile infections include:

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

Who is at risk to get C. diff?

People over age 65 and those with certain medical problems have the greatest chance of getting C. diff. C. diff “spores” can live outside the human body for a very long time on things in the environment such as bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, and medical equipment. These spores can spread the infection from person to person on contaminated equipment and on the hands of doctors, nurses, other healthcare providers, or visitors. (This is why hand washing is so important!)

Preventing the spread of C. diff is very important, both in the hospital (see below) and at home (see page 2).

How is C. diff treated?

C. diff can be treated with antibiotics. If the infection returns, there are other procedures that may be done to successfully treat C. diff. Your doctor will discuss these options with you if needed.

Preventing C. diff infections IN THE HOSPITAL

YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS will do these things:

- Put any patient with C. diff in a private room. If a private room is unavailable, patients should share rooms with other people who have C. diff.
- Clean their hands BEFORE caring for a patient (with either soap and water OR hand sanitizer)
- ONLY clean their hands with soap and water AFTER caring for a patient (see page 2). Note that hand sanitizer does NOT kill C. diff spores.
- Wear gloves and a gown over their clothing while caring for you, and remove them before leaving your room.
- Clean all hospital rooms and medical equipment carefully and often.
- Give antibiotics only when necessary.

YOU can do these things:

- Make sure all healthcare providers ONLY use soap and water to wash their hands AFTER caring for you (see box on page 2). Hand sanitizer use is okay before someone comes in contact with C. diff spores.
- Wash your own hands with soap and water often, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
- Stay in your hospital room as much as possible. Avoid common areas such as the gift shop or cafeteria. (You may go to other hospital areas for treatments or tests.)
- Only take antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor.

YOUR VISITORS can do these things:

- Wash their hands with soap and water when entering or leaving your room (see page 2).
- Ask a healthcare provider about wearing a protective gown or gloves while visiting you.

Even if you are being treated for C. diff, the bacteria can still spread to other people.
**Preventing C. diff infections AT HOME**

Once you’re home, you can return to your normal routine. Often the diarrhea will be better or completely gone before you go home. This makes giving C. diff to others much less likely.

Do these things to reduce the chance of getting C. diff again or spreading it to others:

- Take any medicine for C. diff exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Don’t take half-doses, and don’t stop before you complete your prescribed medicine.
- Wash your hands often, especially after using the bathroom and before preparing food (see instructions at right). **NO hand sanitizers.**
- Make sure people who live with you wash their hands often as well.
- Follow any other instructions your doctor gives you.
- Take extra care to regularly clean your bathroom and high-touch surfaces as thoroughly as possible.

**When should I call a doctor?**

Contact your healthcare provider if you have:
- Diarrhea **(call immediately)**
- Any other questions (write them down here):

Healthcare provider:
Name:__________________________
Phone number:__________________________

**Hand washing with soap and water**

1. Wet hands with warm, running water.
2. Apply liquid soap or use a clean bar of soap. Lather well.
3. Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers.
4. Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
5. Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

People can become infected if they touch surfaces that are contaminated with germs. Healthcare providers can spread the germs if they don’t wash their hands often enough. If you don’t see your healthcare providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

The information in this fact sheet is cosponsored by: Society of Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA), Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA), American Hospital Association (AHA), Association for Practitioners in Infection Control (APIC), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Joint Commission

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