

Let's Talk About...

Clostridium difficile (C. difficile or C. diff)

Clostridium difficile (klo-STRID-ee-um DIF-ah-seal), also called **C. difficile**, is a bacteria commonly found in the intestines. Some types of *C. difficile* create toxins (poisons) that make children sick, especially if there is a lot of bacteria in the intestines.

Most *C. difficile* infections happen in the hospital while or after someone takes antibiotics. A child can also get sick from *C. difficile* weeks after going home from the hospital or stopping antibiotics. Antibiotics can kill the normal bacteria in the intestines, which allows a lot of *C. difficile* to grow.

Children also become sick from *C. difficile* if they have stomach or bowel surgeries. A child in the hospital for a long time, or who has a serious illness or immune system problem, is also at risk for *C. difficile*. Touching items dirty with stool (poop) and then touching the mouth area can also cause infection.

C. difficile bacteria are common in the environment. They can survive for months on surfaces not cleaned and sterilized properly.

What are the symptoms of C. difficile?

- Diarrhea (often with blood or mucus)
- Fever
- Nausea
- Dehydration (loss of body fluids)
- Stomach pain, tenderness or cramping
- Loss of appetite

How is C. difficile diagnosed?

To find out if your child has *C. difficile*, the caregiver will take a stool (poop) sample and send it to the lab for testing. Your child's nurse or physician should know the test results within a few hours.

How will my child's doctor treat C. difficile?

The doctor will order antibiotics to treat *C. difficile* and kill the bacteria. Your child will take these for about 10 days. An IV (small tube that goes into the vein) may be placed so your child can receive medicines and fluids.

Are there any complications from C. difficile infections?

If not treated with antibiotics and fluids, *C. difficile* can cause low blood pressure and electrolytes (body salt) to be too high or too low. Blood infection, stomach lining pain, intestinal problems and, rarely, death are also complications.

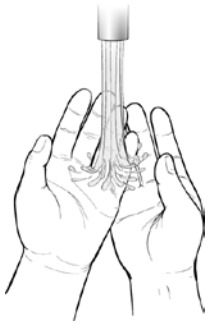
Preventing C. difficile infections while your child is in the hospital:

Even if *C. difficile* is treated, the germs can still spread to others. While your child is in the hospital, you and your caregivers can work together to keep *C. difficile* from spreading.

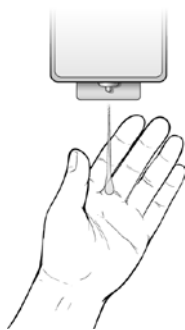
Your child's healthcare providers will do these things:

- Clean their hands with soap and water after caring for each patient. They can use alcohol-based hand rub before they enter the room, but they must use soap and water after caring for your child. Alcohol-based hand rub does not kill all *C. difficile* germs.
- Wear gloves and gowns over their clothing while caring for your child. They will remove them before leaving the room.
- Place your child in "contact precautions" isolation. Children cannot leave the room while they have diarrhea because *C. difficile* can spread to other patients. Sometimes doctors will decide it is safe for children to go for walks, or wheelchair or wagon rides. However, they cannot go in the playroom or Forever Young Zone, gift shop, or cafeteria.

Hand washing with soap and water



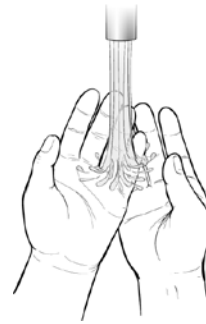
Wet hands with warm, running water.



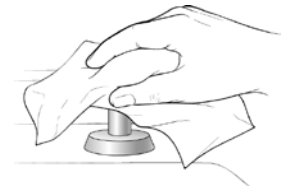
Apply liquid soap or use a clean bar of soap. Lather well.



Rub your hands together vigorously for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Be sure to scrub all surfaces of your hands and fingers.



Rinse well. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.



Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

- Put your child in a private room whenever possible. If there is no private room, your child will share a room with other patients with *C. difficile*.
- Clean and sanitize medical equipment and often-touched areas in your child's hospital room with bleach. This is the best disinfectant for *C. difficile*.
- Give antibiotics only when needed.

YOU can do these things:

- Make sure healthcare providers clean their hands before and after caring for your child.
- Clean your own hands often, especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before eating.
- Wear gloves and gowns if your child's caregiver asks you to. Wash your hands when you leave the room.

Visitors to your child's room can do these things:

- Wash their hands well when entering and leaving the room.
- Wear gloves and gowns (only if the caregiver asks them to).

When can my child go home?

A child with *C. difficile* can usually go home when the diarrhea stops. Your child also needs to be finished with IV antibiotic treatment or taking pills by mouth.

It is also important for your child to have enough body fluids. Children with active diarrhea lose more water than they take in. This makes them more sick. If your child gets diarrhea again after going home, tell your doctor immediately.

Preventing *C. difficile* infections when your child goes home:

Your child can return to his everyday routines after leaving the hospital. The diarrhea will often be better or gone before your child goes home. This makes spreading *C. difficile* to others much less likely. However, take these steps to protect your child from getting another *C. difficile* infection or spreading it to others.

- Make sure your child takes antibiotics exactly as the doctor said. Don't stop before the medicine is gone, and don't let your child skip doses or take half-doses.
- Do not ask your child's doctor for antibiotics to treat common colds or viruses. Antibiotics treat only infections.

- Clean hands often and well, especially after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing food or eating. Good hand washing means using soap and scrubbing fingers, palms and nails for at least 20 seconds.
- Make sure people who live with you clean their hands often and well.
- If your child gets diarrhea again after going home, tell your doctor immediately.
- Follow other instructions from your child's doctor.

What if I have more questions?

Your child's doctors and nurses are always available to help answer your questions and make you feel as comfortable as possible during your hospital stay.

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