



Clostridium Difficile (C. Difficile)

What is it?

C. difficile is a bacterium that produces a toxin (a type of poison) that can cause an inflammation of the intestinal tract. It is the most common cause of hospital-acquired infectious diarrhea.

C. difficile can be part of the normal bacteria that live in the intestine. It can also be acquired in the large intestine after hospital admission. Taking certain antibiotics can change the normal balance of bacteria in the large intestine making it easier for C.difficile to grow and cause infection. C. difficile has also been found on the hands of persons and in the environment surrounding infected patients.

What are the symptoms and when do they occur?

Symptoms appear one to 10 days after exposure to a situation that increases risk of developing C. difficile. The usual symptoms are diarrhea (sometimes explosive) with or without blood.

Who is at risk?

Persons at risk for C.difficile infection are persons who have been on certain antibiotics, had bowel surgery, are on chemotherapy or are in hospital for a long period of time. Factors that increase the risk are increased age and/or serious underlying illness or debilitation.

How can I protect myself and prevent the spread?

Thorough hand washing with soap and warm water, both by the infected patient and health care worker, is an important way to reduce spread. Always wash hands after toileting, handling bed linens and bedpans. Avoid contamination of the environment with these items from an infected person.



Health care workers will wear gowns and gloves when caring for a patient infected with C. difficile. Visitors to patients in hospital with C. difficile infection should ask the nursing personnel for instructions about personal protection.

Precautions may be discontinued if there has been no diarrhea for 48 hours. Precautions will be discontinued under the direction of the hospital infection prevention and control personnel.

After discharge from hospital, patients with C.difficile are not a concern for other family members, as person-to-person transmission within the home setting is rare. All family members should practice thorough hand washing with soap and warm water.

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