

CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE (C. DIFF)

What is it?

Clostridium Difficile (C. Diff) is a bacteria in the intestines (bowel) of most people. Other bacteria in the bowel ("good" bacteria needed for digestion) keep the numbers of C.Diff under control so they don't cause illness. But when someone takes an antibiotic to treat an infection, it may destroy those "good" bacteria, allowing the C.Diff bacteria to grow quickly out of control. It then produces toxins (poisons) that attack the lining of the intestine.

Who gets it?

The risk is greatest if the person:

- Is taking or has recently taken antibiotics
- Is 65 years or older
- Has a weakened immune system
- Has been recently hospitalized or spent time in a nursing home or rehabilitation facility
- Has had recent abdominal surgery
- Has a chronic bowel disease
- Takes prescription or over the counter antacids
- Has had a previous C. diff infection

Is it treatable?

Yes. Although the bacteria may be resistant to many antibiotics and difficult to treat, some antibiotics can still successfully cure the infection. The use of probiotics or live bacteria from foods such as yogurt can introduce "good" bacteria back into the bowel to crowd out the C. Diff. Discuss this option with the HCP.

What are some signs of infection with C. Diff?

The person you support:

- Has large, watery, foul smelling diarrhea - 10 or more BMs a day
- Has a fever, often greater than 101 degrees
- Has abdominal pain, which may be severe
- Has blood, pus or mucus-like substance in the stool
- Has nausea
- Is dehydrated, or has decreased urine output
- Has weight loss

Contact the person's HCP immediately if you see these symptoms.

Serious complications of C. Diff infection include dehydration, kidney failure, a hole in the bowel (perforation) or toxic megacolon, a very serious condition that causes the bowel to expand and rupture.

Can it spread?

Yes. It is almost always spread by physical contact and not through the air. **The most common way of spreading it is on the hands of caregivers.** Standard Precautions must be scrupulously adhered to in managing the spread of this illness. Careful attention to hand washing before and after wearing gloves as well as the disinfection of surfaces especially toilets and bathroom fixtures is essential. Careful disposal of all stools and cleaning of contaminated clothing is also essential.

What should you do?

Call 911 if the person:

- looks very sick
- won't wake up
- has chills or is shaking or a high fever
- is confused or disoriented
- has low blood pressure and a fast heart rate
- has significant decrease in urine output

Other situations:

Call the HCP if person has: (especially if the person is at risk)

- Symptoms last more than 3 days
- More than 3 BMs in a day
- Severe pain or cramping
- Decreased urine output
- Blood or pus in stool