

# Clostridium Difficile

## What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile is a bacteria that can cause diarrhoea. It is present as one of the 'normal' bacteria in the gut in up to 3% of healthy adults. It is a major cause of antibiotic-associated diarrhoea.

The bacteria forms spores that can survive for long periods of time in the environment and are difficult to kill using routine cleaning agents. It can therefore be easily transmitted to susceptible people.

## What does it cause?

Clostridium difficile can cause diarrhoea when certain antibiotics disturb the balance of 'friendly' bacteria in the gut. In the majority of people, the resulting illness is mild, however symptoms can be wide ranging from mild diarrhoea to severe colitis (inflammation of the gut), and at worst, perforation of the bowel which could lead to further infection and complications.

## How do you catch it?

The infection may be acquired directly from other infected people or from the environment. It especially affects the elderly and the debilitated and is nearly always triggered by the use of antibiotics.

A patient who has Clostridium difficile diarrhoea infection can excrete large numbers of the spores when having a bowel movement. This can contaminate the surrounding environment such as a room, bed, the toilet area or commodes.

## How will the Clostridium difficile be treated?

Fortunately, most people develop only a mild illness and stopping the antibiotics together with increased fluid intake usually results in rapid improvement.

Sometimes specific antibiotic treatment against the Clostridium difficile infection will be prescribed.



## How will I be managed in hospital?

When a patient in hospital has been diagnosed as having Clostridium difficile infection a number of steps are put into place to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to other patients, for example:

- wherever possible you will be nursed in a single room to avoid contamination of the environment.
- you should have your own toilet or commode.
- linen from your room will be treated as infected.
- your environment such as toilet or commode, bed, chairs will be thoroughly and regularly cleaned with a disinfectant.
- thorough hand washing using soap and water should be practiced by all care staff, and you should be encouraged to regularly wash your own hands, especially after using the toilet and before eating.
- staff should wear disposable aprons and gloves when giving you care.
- your room will be thoroughly decontaminated with hydrogen peroxide vapour at the end of your stay.

## How long will I be in a single room?

We cannot give you a definite answer, as it may take differing lengths of time for the diarrhoea to settle in different people. You will only be in a single room whilst it is absolutely necessary.

## Is there a risk to my family or visitors?

The risk of healthy people acquiring Clostridium difficile is extremely small. As already said Clostridium difficile is almost always triggered by the use of antibiotics. All visitors should see the nurse in charge, who will give guidance before visiting. They should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water and use the alcohol gel when leaving the ward. This will also ensure that visitors do not pass the bacteria on to others. Visitors do not need to wear gloves or aprons when they are visiting.

## Is there anyone I can speak to about Clostridium difficile?

The ward staff may be able to answer your questions. If not, a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team will be happy to discuss Clostridium difficile with you at an arranged mutually convenient time.

## Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS staff are available to offer advice or information on healthcare matters. The office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email. PALS staff can also visit inpatients on all Trust sites. **The contact details are: Telephone:** 01302 553140 or 0800 028 8059

