

*You can help
stop the spread
of C. diff
infection by
keeping your
hands clean.*

Clostridioides difficile

Clostridioides difficile (formerly Clostridium difficile), also called C. diff, is a bacteria that can be found in your bowels. Small amounts may be normal. Large amounts may lead to infection.

C. diff infection

Some types of C. diff produce toxins (harmful substances). These toxins can:

- Irritate your bowel
- Cause diarrhea
- Lead to infection

In some cases, certain antibiotics may decrease the amount of normal bacteria in your bowel. This may then cause the amount of C. diff to increase, raising your risk of infection.

Most cases of C. diff infection occur in patients taking antibiotics. You are also at risk for C. diff infection if you:

- Are a patient in the hospital
- Live in a nursing home
- Are an older adult
- Have a weakened immune system from diseases such as cancer or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection
- Had bowel surgery

How C. diff spreads

C. diff can live outside of the body for a very long time. It can be spread by touching contaminated surfaces such as medical equipment, bed rails, bed linens and bathroom fixtures.

C. diff can also be spread on the gloved or ungloved hands of nurses, physicians, other healthcare workers and visitors.

Hand-washing can help stop the spread of C. diff.

C. diff infection symptoms

The most common symptom of C. diff infection, is 3 or more episodes of diarrhea in 24 hours. You may also have a fever, loss of appetite, nausea and stomach cramping. If C. diff infection is suspected, a sample of your stool may be tested.

Treatment of C. diff infection

If you are taking antibiotics, your physician may stop them. Other types of antibiotics targeting C. diff may be given either by mouth or IV (intravenously, or into the vein).

Special precautions taken by hospital staff

“Contact Plus” precautions are followed by those caring for you. This means all hospital staff and visitors will wear gowns and gloves when entering your room. (You may leave your door open.) Hospital cleaning staff will clean your room daily using a disinfectant cleaner with bleach. These steps help prevent further spread of C. diff.

Hospital staff and visitors will follow Contact Plus precautions until your diarrhea has stopped.

Visitor guidelines

You may have visitors. Visitors should report to the nurses’ station for directions on what to do to enter your room. Visitors are not likely to get C. diff from you, but they should:

- Clean their hands before they enter and when they leave your room
- Wear isolation gowns and gloves when entering your room

Care at home

Although most healthy people are not at risk for becoming ill from C. diff, it is important to know that taking an antibiotic increases your risk of getting C. diff. You can help prevent the spread of C. diff in your home by:

- Washing your hands often with soap and water. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom and before eating and cooking food.
- People who live with you should clean their hands often.

If you are given medicines to treat your C. diff infection, be sure to take them as prescribed.

If your diarrhea gets worse or comes back after your treatment, call your physician right away.