

C. diff (Clostridium difficile)

Patient Information



Around 3% of adults and 70% of children have C. diff in their intestines. C. diff can cause diarrhoea and other illnesses.

This leaflet does not replace a discussion between you and your doctor.

What is C. diff?

It is a germ (bacterium).

Is C. diff called something else?

C. diff can sometimes be called C. difficile, Clostridium difficile and Clostridioides difficile. Commonly it is referred to as C.diff.

How does it make people sick?

It multiplies in intestines, causing diarrhoea; often, this happens because of antibiotics. Some antibiotics kill good bacteria, then C. diff (if present) gets out of control and people get unwell. Diarrhoea can last for days or weeks if left untreated. C. diff can also make you feel sick and cause tummy cramps.

Who is most at risk?

Anyone who takes antibiotics is at risk of developing C. diff, as the bacterium can be present in the gut. However, the risk of infection is usually low and depends on the antibiotic. Older people and anyone who has had an operation recently can be more at risk of getting an infection.

How is it spread?

It spreads from an infected person's poo, which gets on surfaces and hands and into the mouth.

How is it diagnosed?

A health worker can confirm it by taking a stool sample (a sample of your poo). They'll take a sample if you've had watery diarrhoea in the past 24 hours. They will need to know whether you've taken antibiotics. If you have a *C. diff* infection, the stool test will show *C. diff* and toxins.

I have been told that I am a carrier – what does that mean?

You're a carrier if the stool sample shows *C. diff* but no toxins present (toxins are poisons).

How is it treated?

Often, this involves antibiotics aimed to reduce *C. diff*. Your doctor or nurse will review any antibiotics you may be taking. Some people need more treatment (it depends on the symptoms).

Should I take special precautions?

Wash your hands with soap and water often, especially after going to the toilet. Please show your *C. diff* card to any professional caring for you.

Should other people take any special precautions?

In hospital, you'll have your own room and toilet. Doctors and nurses should wash their hands before and after assisting you.



Remember:

Always wash hands with soap and water. Hand gel does not kill *C. diff* bacteria.

C. diff card

You'll receive a card if (a) you test positive and (b) you live in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

If you're in hospital and test positive, your card may be sent to you at home when you are discharged.

You must show this card to any health professional who is involved with your care.

The card lets health professionals know that you may be at risk of developing symptoms or having another infection.

It also allows them to take any other precautions for your care.

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