



Infection Prevention & Control

Clostridium difficile (C.diff)

A patient's guide



Can I have visitors?

You can have visitors but please ask them to seek advice first from the nursing staff on the ward. All visitors will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water before entering and leaving your single room, which is important in preventing the spread of infection.

It is not necessary for your relatives / friends to wear gloves and an apron on their visit unless they are involved in your personal care.

Further information:

If you have any questions or require further information please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on 0207 288 3261 or you can ask the ward manager to contact us.

Public Health England website also provides additional information
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or

whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (C.diff) is a bacterium which lives in the intestines of a small percentage of healthy adults and never causes any symptoms. This is called colonisation however; sometimes the bacteria start growing, producing toxins, which can cause inflammation with symptoms such as diarrhoea, this is then an infection.

Certain antibiotics can sometimes kill off the friendly bacteria thus enabling the C.diff to grow. The over 65-age group are the most at risk.

How do you catch C.diff?

The bacteria can spread in health care facilities, like hospitals where health care workers are more likely to come into contact with it, and then with other patients. You can also become infected if you touch clothing, sheets or other surfaces that have come in contact with faeces and then touch your mouth.

What are the symptoms of C.diff?

Diarrhoea and abdominal cramping, even with a mild infection. Your diarrhoea will have a strong foul odour. In more serious infections there may be blood in the stool. If you have diarrhoea three or more times a day you must inform your doctor.

Other symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, dehydration and nausea.

Is it infectious?

Yes. The bacterium is passed out of the body in the stool. The spores from the bacteria in the diarrhoea can contaminate the environment wherever they land, potentially helping the bacteria to spread to other patients. C.diff can survive undetected on surfaces for long periods of time such as on floors, shelving, bedrails and in around toilets.

You will be moved into a side room with an ensuite facility in order to minimise the risk of spread to other patients. Staff will wear apron and gloves when providing you direct care, which will be disposed of inside the room. Staff must perform hand washing with soap and water before leaving the side room.

How long will I need to stay in the side room for?

Once the diarrhoea has settled and your bowel movements have returned to normal, you can be moved out onto the ward.

What treatment is available?

It depends on the severity of the symptoms, normally other antibiotics are discontinued - in a small number of patients the diarrhoea may go away when these are stopped. Special antibiotics which target the bacteria can also be prescribed and are taken for between 10 to 14 days.

C.diff infection usually responds well to treatment, with most people making a full recovery within a week or two. However, the symptoms may come back in around one in five cases and treatment may need to be repeated.

What are the potential complications?

There is a possibility that you may become dehydrated due to losing too much fluid from the diarrhoea.

What about my personal laundry?

Personal laundry should be bagged and kept in your room for relatives / friends to collect as soon as possible. Personal laundry from your stay in hospital should be washed separately. Remember to wash your hands after handling soiled linen.

How long will I need to stay in hospital for?

There is no determined set time. It really depends on whether your doctors and nurses are happy with you being discharged and that there are no complications with your home circumstances.