

## What is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*)?

*C. difficile* is a toxin-producing, spore-forming type of bacteria (germ) that can cause diarrheal disease.

### Who gets *C. difficile*?

Most *C. difficile* infections occur after antibiotic use. It is most commonly found in older adults who are patients in hospitals or live in long term care facilities (LTCFs). Healthy people usually do not become ill with diarrhea even if the bacteria are in their intestines. However, in recent years, some otherwise healthy people who were not taking antibiotics and were not hospitalized or staying in LTCFs have become ill with *C. difficile* disease.

### How do you get *C. difficile*?

*C. difficile* spores can live outside the body for a long time. They may be found in stool or on contaminated surfaces or items. You may pick up bacteria on your hands by touching contaminated surfaces or items and transferring them to your mouth during eating or other activities like licking your fingers. Spores are not killed by stomach acids so they pass into your intestines where they can multiply and may cause diarrheal disease.

## Wash Your Hands to Prevent *C. difficile*

Wash your hands:

- When they are dirty.
- Before and after using the bathroom.
- After sneezing, coughing, or using tissue.
- Before making or serving food.
- Before eating.
- Before feeding a baby.
- Before and after changing a baby's diaper.
- Before handling freshly laundered clothes.
- After touching dirty laundry.
- After touching the garbage or trash.
- After taking off disposable gloves.
- After touching animals or their waste.

**ANTIBIOTIC  
RESISTANCE**  
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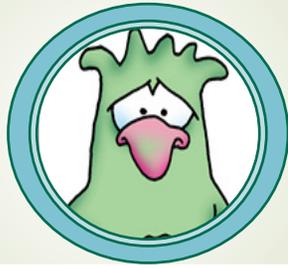
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## What to do about *Clostridium difficile*



**Information for  
patients and their families**



### What are the symptoms of *C. difficile*?

Watery diarrhea (three or more times a day for two or more days) and fever are the most common symptoms. Loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain may also occur. *C. difficile* may cause mild diarrhea, or it may cause very serious disease, sometimes even death.

### How is *C. difficile* diagnosed?

Watery, unformed stool samples are sent to a laboratory where they are tested for *C. difficile*.

### How do you treat *C. difficile*?

Some people who have *C. difficile* because they are taking antibiotics recover without treatment once they stop taking antibiotics. Other people have more severe infections and may have to be treated with specific antibiotics to get rid of *C. difficile*.

### How do you prevent spreading *C. difficile*?

- **Handwashing**
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water, using friction. Always wash your hands after going to the bathroom and before preparing food.
  - Remind everyone who lives with you to wash their hands with soap and water frequently.

- Do NOT use alcohol hand sanitizers (instead of soap and water) because they do NOT kill spores.
- **Cleaning and disinfecting**
  - **High touch areas** (light switches, door knobs, faucet handles, phones, etc.)—clean and disinfect routinely. If visibly dirty, scrub first using a cleaner/detergent, and rinse with water. Then disinfect high touch areas with a household bleach solution or bleach wipes and let air dry. Remember to wear disposable gloves when using a disinfectant.
  - **Trash**—put gloves and other waste in a plastic sack that is tied off before placing in regular trash.
  - **Bedding**—wash bedding once or twice a week and when visibly soiled. See laundry directions (below).
  - **Laundry**
    - Carry dirty laundry away from your body so it doesn't contaminate your clothes.
    - Wash bedding and clothing in hot water with a detergent that contains bleach or add bleach.
    - Do not overload your washing machine.
    - Dry clothes well in a hot dryer.
    - Clean and disinfect your laundry "basket" between dirty and clean laundry.
    - Wash your hands before touching clean laundry.

- **Preparing food**

Do not prepare food for your family, friends, or others until 48 hours after your last diarrhea stool. If there is absolutely no one else to prepare food for your family, be sure to always scrub your hands with soap and water after going to the bathroom and before preparing food.

- **Using antibiotics wisely**

If you are given antibiotics to treat *C. difficile*, take your medicine exactly as it was ordered. Do not skip doses or stop taking your antibiotics until they are all gone.

- **Using a dedicated bathroom**

If there is only one bathroom, clean the toilet seat and handle, as well as the sink and faucets after each use if visibly dirty. Then disinfect these surfaces using a household bleach solution.

- **Monitoring your diarrhea**

If you develop diarrhea again after it has cleared up, tell your medical provider immediately.

#### Mix Household Bleach Solution

Follow directions on the household bleach label to make a bleach and water solution for disinfection. Generally the recommendation is 1/2 to 3/4 cup household bleach per gallon of water.

#### Remember:

You must make a new bleach solution each day.