



**Clostridioides
difficile infection
(CDI)**

**Information for people who are
receiving care, their visitors,
and anyone else who is in a
healthcare setting**

What is Clostridioides difficile?

Clostridioides difficile is sometimes called C. difficile (or C. diff) for short. It is a bacterium (or germ) that some people have in their bowel. It doesn't normally cause any problems in healthy people.

How does C. difficile infection (CDI) start?

The good bacteria in your gut will normally protect your body against this kind of infection. But if you are taking antibiotics to treat another infection, this can kill both the good and the bad bacteria. When this happens, the C. difficile bacteria can grow quickly and produce poisonous toxins in your bowel. This can start a C. difficile infection.

You may be more likely to get the infection if you:

- have been taking antibiotics within the last three months
- are elderly
- have had recent stays in hospital
- have had certain medical procedures or operations to your bowel
- have reduced ability to fight infection (a weakened immune system)

How do I know if I have C. difficile infection?

Your doctor will examine you and ask about your symptoms. If you have diarrhoea, a sample of your poo will be sent to the laboratory to test for a C. difficile infection. The test will confirm your result in one or two days.

Some people will only have a mild infection that lasts a few days. Diarrhoea can sometimes clear up on its own without any treatment.

In more severe cases, the effects of a C. difficile infection can be more serious, and symptoms can last for several weeks. You might need treatment for the toxins in your gut from the infection. Your diarrhoea might have blood in it, and you may have pain in your stomach.

In a very small number of cases, having a C. difficile infection can make you very unwell and even be a threat to your life.

How does C. difficile spread to people in healthcare settings?

C. difficile spores are passed in the poo of people who are infected and can survive for a long time on any surface, for example on furniture, the toilet, bed sheets, and frequently touched surfaces such as door handles and buzzers.

You can accidentally pick the infection up by touching dirty or contaminated

surfaces and then touching your mouth or eating. All staff, visitors, and anyone receiving care can spread the infection to themselves or other people if they don't wash their hands properly or after contact with anyone receiving care, their surroundings or contaminated equipment.

What are healthcare settings doing to stop C. difficile from spreading?


If you have symptoms of C. difficile infection, you may have a single room with your own toilet or be put into a certain area of the care setting.

Precautions to prevent and control infection will be put in place to stop the infection spreading to others until your bowels are working normally again.

Staff will assess the need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) for your care and in any areas where C. difficile infection is present. Staff will put used PPE in the healthcare waste bin. They will then wash their hands with running water and liquid soap and dry them with paper towels.

Visitors and anyone receiving care must wash and dry their hands thoroughly. Hand rubs on their own do not work against the C. difficile bacterium.

Anyone who is not able to wash their hands will be helped, especially after using the toilet and before eating.



Patients and relatives are encouraged not to bring excessive personal belongings and supplies into healthcare settings. Care areas should be free from clutter and will be cleaned more frequently than normal.

Your doctor might stop or change your antibiotics or any stomach medicine.

Top tips to prevent C. difficile spreading

Healthy people are not usually at risk of getting C. difficile and should be able to visit anyone who has C. difficile.

If you are visiting someone in a health or other care setting, you should:

- always wash and dry your hands thoroughly on arrival and before leaving, using running water, liquid soap and disposable paper towels
- not sit on beds
- not use the same toilet as the person receiving care
- not visit other people receiving care at the same time unless you visit them first
- not bring in food
- not eat at the bedside of the person you are visiting
- not visit someone if you feel unwell.

What happens when I go home?

The care staff will have told your GP that you have had a C. difficile infection. They will do this because it may affect how you are prescribed antibiotics or medicine for stomach complaints in the future.

If you have symptoms of diarrhoea or C. difficile again, you should contact your GP. You may have to give another sample of your poo to your GP.

Staff contact details:

National Infection Prevention and Control Manual www.nipcm.hps.scot.nhs.uk/
Please phone **0141 300 1175** for more information.

This publication can be made available in large print, Braille (English only), audio tape and different languages. Please contact nss.equalitydiversity@nhs.scot for further information.

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