



## *Clostridium difficile* (*C. diff*)

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

*Clostridium difficile* [klo-STRID-ee-um dif-uh-SEEL] is a bacterium that causes inflammation in the colon, leading to diarrhea. Toxin-producing strains of *C. difficile* may cause disease.

### **What diseases may be caused by *C. difficile*?**

The diseases caused by *C. difficile* infection are: colitis, more serious intestinal conditions, sepsis and occasionally death.

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

Symptoms include:

- watery diarrhea (at least three bowel movements per day for two or more days)
- fever
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- abdominal pain/tenderness

### **How is *C. difficile* disease treated?**

Since *C. difficile* usually follows extended use of an antibiotic, the first step in treating *C. difficile* is to stop the associated antibiotic. In a small number of people, diarrhea will stop when the antibiotic is discontinued. If not, *C. difficile* is then treated with different antibiotics prescribed by your healthcare provider and may include either metronidazole, vancomycin or fidaxomicin.

### **How do people get *C. difficile* disease?**

People in good health usually don't get *C. difficile* disease. People who have illnesses or conditions requiring prolonged use of antibiotics or the elderly are at greater risk of acquiring this disease. When a person takes antibiotics for long periods of time, the helpful bacteria that protect against infection are destroyed. During this time, patients can easily get sick from *C. difficile*. The bacteria are found in the feces of infected persons and others can become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with feces and then touch their mouth, eyes or nose. Healthcare workers can spread the bacteria to other patients or contaminate surfaces through hand contact. *C. difficile* can live on surfaces for long periods of time because it is able to form spores (a protective coating), which helps it survive.

### **What should I do to prevent the spread of *C. difficile* to others?**

If you are infected you can spread the disease to others. However, only people that are hospitalized or on antibiotics are likely to become ill. For safety precautions, you can do the following to reduce the chance of spread to others:

- wash hands with soap and water, especially after using the restroom and before eating;
- clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas on a regular basis with solution of 1:10 bleach.

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### **What should I do if I think I have *C. difficile* disease?**

See your healthcare provider.

### **School/Childcare Attendance**

While the child is having diarrhea, he is not allowed to attend school/childcare. As soon as the diarrhea stops, the child can re-enter school/childcare.

### **Home, School or Childcare Precautions**

- Follow proper sanitation procedures for food handling and cooking.
- Wash hands:
  - Before, during and after food preparation.
  - After using the toilet or helping a child use the toilet.
  - Before and after diapering a child.
- Have children wash their hands after toileting, diapering and before meals and snacks.
- Keep nails short and clean.
- Disinfect diaper-changing areas after each change. Disinfect toys, toilets, sinks, water fountains and food preparation surfaces at least daily with a solution recommended by the Public Health Division.
- Watch for symptoms among staff or students. Call the Public Health Division if two or more staff or students have symptoms within a 48-hour time span.

For more information contact Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at 336-641-7777 or [www.myguilford.com](http://www.myguilford.com), or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

Source: CDC