

What is Clostridioides difficile (C.difficile)?

Clostridioides difficile is a germ that can be found in our intestines (our gut).

There are different strains of C.difficile and some can cause a more serious infection than others. However, C.difficile won't develop into an infection in most healthy people.

About 3 per cent of all adults and two thirds of babies carry this without any symptoms or illness.

How do you catch a C.difficile infection?

You may develop C.difficile infection by ingesting bacteria, after direct contact with a contaminated environment or contact with someone who has the infection.

Antibiotics can help kill the bacteria causing other illnesses but can also affect the natural balance of the good bacteria in your gut.

This may allow the C.difficile bacteria to produce a toxin (poison) that then causes diarrhoea.

In more vulnerable people, particularly those whose normal gut bacteria has been disrupted by antibiotic treatment, C.difficile may be able to multiply in the gut and go on to cause infection.

What are the symptoms?

If you have the C.difficile infection, you may experience:

- Diarrhoea/ loose stool
- Abdominal pain
- Fever
- Vomiting (in some rare cases)

C.difficile bacteria produce toxins, which may damage the inner lining of the gut.



How is C.difficile infection diagnosed?

C.difficile infection is diagnosed by sending stool sample to a laboratory for testing. If you're showing the symptoms of diarrhoea /loose stool you may be moved into a single room to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to others. You may be given a dedicated commode or own toilet.

It is very important to wash your hands before eating and after using the toilet with soap and water. Using alcohol hand rub on its own is not effective against C.difficile spores.

C difficile infection will be recorded in your medical notes. This is to ensure that staff are aware and reviewed your medication if necessary.

Who is at risk?

Various strains of C.difficile affect all age groups. A number of different things can increase the risk of developing C.difficile, such as:

- If you're taking antibiotics
- If you've had stomach and/or digestive tract surgery or investigations
- If you've had a prolonged length of stay in hospital
- If you have a medical condition which affects your immune system
- If you're 65 years or older

Treatment

How is C.difficile infection treated?

C.difficile can be treated with specific antibiotics as directed by your doctor.

How to prevent the spread of C.difficile infection?

We can all play a part in preventing the spread of C.difficile infection.

What is our role?

- Our staff make sure you receive the most suitable antibiotics, and only when necessary
- We'll ensure that you're cared in a single room (or a dedicated toilet/ commode) with precautions or grouped with other patients to reduce the risk of spreading the infection
- Our staff will wash their hands with soap and water when caring for you.
- Staff will wear personal protective equipment based on risks
- We will encourage that you, your visitors, and all staff wash their hands with soap and water when attending your care needs
- We clean the environment and equipment used in your care properly with the recommended cleaning products

What is your role?

- Wash your hands properly with soap and water, especially before eating and after visiting the toilet - alcohol hand rub on its own is not effective against C.difficile spores
- Wash any soiled clothing and bedding separately at the highest possible temperature
- Have liquid soap and paper kitchen towels available so that our visiting carers can wash and dry their hands properly if you're receiving care at home
- Clean your toilet and bathroom with domestic bleach

What is the visitor's role?

Family and friends visiting can wash their hands with soap and water before and after they see you. People caring for you can ask our staff for guidance around the use of aprons and gloves. Our staff can help you if you have any questions.

Do patients with C.difficile need to stay in hospital longer?

Patients with C.difficile infection may need to stay in hospital longer based on their individual clinical conditions.

What happens if I think I have developed C.difficile at home?

If you develop symptoms of diarrhoea/ loose stool, contact your GP.

If a stool specimen confirms that you have C.difficile you may be prescribed treatment.

Take the following precautions to prevent the spread of infection:

- Wash your hands properly with soap and water, especially before eating and after visiting the toilet - alcohol hand rub on its own is not effective against C.difficile spores
- Wash any soiled clothing and bedding separately at the highest possible temperature
- Have liquid soap and paper kitchen towels available so that our visiting carers can wash and dry their hands properly if you're receiving care at home
- Clean your toilet and bathroom with domestic bleach

You can find further advice from the NHS on how to prevent the spread of infections.

[nhs.uk/common-health-questions/infections](https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/infections)

[gov.uk/government/collections/clostridium-difficile-guidance-data-and-analysis](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/clostridium-difficile-guidance-data-and-analysis)

@ Infection.control@berkshire.nhs.uk

0118 960 5140

berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/infection-prevention-control



Scan me