



Infection Prevention and Control

# Clostridioides difficile

Information for patients and visitors

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# What is *Clostridioides difficile*?

*Clostridioides difficile* (also known as “*C. difficile*” or “*C. diff*”) bacteria usually live harmlessly in your bowel along with lots of other types of bacteria.

It can be found in about 3% of healthy adults, and two thirds of babies and causes no symptoms.

However, sometimes when you take antibiotics, the balance of bacteria in your bowel can change, causing an infection.

## How is it spread?

When someone has a *C. diff* infection, it can spread to other people very easily if the bacteria found in the person’s poo finds its way onto objects and surfaces.

## How is the diagnosis made?

Initial diagnosis can be on the symptoms and your clinical history (e.g. having taken antibiotics).

If *C. diff* is suspected infection control precautions will be started, and a poo specimen will be sent to the lab for testing.

# Will I need single room?

Where possible you will be looked after in a single room whilst you have *C. diff* infection.

# How will I be treated?

A *C. diff* infection is treated by:

- ✔ Stopping any antibiotics you're taking, if possible
- ✔ Taking a course of another antibiotic that can treat the *C. diff* infection

You'll also be given advice about how to avoid dehydration, such as making sure you drink plenty of water.

Your symptoms should improve a few days after starting the new course of antibiotics. But it may be 1 to 2 weeks before the infection clears up completely.

# What can I do to speed up my recovery?

- ✔ Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- ✔ If you feel like eating, eat foods that are easy to digest.
- ✔ Symptoms usually last for 12 to 60 hours but can sometimes last longer. Most people make a full recovery

within one to two days. However some people may become dehydrated and need further treatment.

## How can I help stop spread?

- ✔ It is very important to keep your hands clean. You should wash your hands with water and soap after you go to the toilet.
- ✔ Clean your hands before you eat.
- ✔ If you have fruit or other food with you it is advisable to keep it covered in a sealed container inside your locker and not to share it with others.

## Remember it's OK to ask!

If you are concerned about hygiene, don't be afraid to ask the doctor or nurse treating you if they have cleaned their hands.

**Remember it's OK to ask!**

# What precautions should visitors take?

Healthy people very rarely catch *C. difficile*. The greatest risk is to those who are frail or unwell (like other hospital patients) or those who are on antibiotics.

- ✔ If frail visitors are planning to visit the ward please ask the nurses for advice.
- ✔ It is not normally necessary for visitors to wear gloves and aprons. However if visitors are having close contact with patients (e.g. helping with washing and dressing) we recommend that they are worn whilst the patient is in a single room.
- ✔ It is important that visitors wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water when they arrive and before leaving the ward. Please ask the nurses if you are unsure.
- ✔ It is not advisable to visit with young children so please check with the nurses before bringing children or babies to visit.

# What happens when I stop having diarrhoea?

Once your diarrhoea has stopped, it means the infection is settling.

If your poo has returned to your normal pattern, you have recovered from the *C. diff* infection.

The staff looking after you will let you know when this is possible.

# Will diarrhoea delay my discharge from hospital?

If you are well enough to leave hospital you may be discharged home. The doctors may want to make sure that your diarrhoea is settling and that you are able to eat and drink normally.

It is important that you talk to the nurses or doctor if you are worried. If you are waiting to be transferred to another hospital the transfer may be delayed until your symptoms have settled.

# What happens if I have diarrhoea again?

Sometimes the diarrhoea can start again. This may be after you have gone home, or while you are still in hospital.

If the symptoms reoccur within the same month, it is likely to be the same infection, however it is important to follow this up as it may be another reason.

If you still in hospital it is important to tell a doctor or nurse if your diarrhoea starts up again.

If you develop diarrhoea or sickness after you go home, it is important that you drink small but frequent drinks to make sure you do not get dehydrated.

This will help you avoid being unnecessarily readmitted to hospital.

You may be asked to provide a sample by your GP if you are at home.

If your symptoms do not settle or you are feeling particularly unwell you may need to contact NHS 111 (telephone 111) or your GP for further advice.



***Infection prevention and control is everyone's responsibility. Patients and visitors all have an important role to play in preventing the spread of healthcare associated infections.***

Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet.

We hope that you have found it useful. If you would like more information, please ask the nurse caring for you or the clinical lead.

If you require further advice or information, please contact the hospital's Infection Prevention and Control Team or a member of the clinical area (ward/outpatient area).

Further information can be found at:

Clostridium difficile (C. diff) - NHS ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))





# Accessibility

Patient information leaflets are available on our website:  
[www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/leaflets)

# Get in touch

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# Feedback

Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) provides advice and support to patients, families, and carers, helping to resolve any problems, concerns, or complaints you may have.

Phone         0800 328 7971

Email         [PALS@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:PALS@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk)

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Support Oxford Health Charity, making a difference to patients, their families and staff who care for them: [www.oxfordhealth.charity](http://www.oxfordhealth.charity)