

Can the diarrhoea come back?

One in five people get the diarrhoea again after treatment with antibiotics.

If your diarrhoea re-starts (or does not settle) contact your GP Surgery and tell them that you have recently had a *C.difficile* infection. This will help to ensure that you are given the correct antibiotics if you need any.

Good hand hygiene, by washing your hands with soap and water (after using the toilet and before meals or food preparation) is vital in reducing the risk of all infections.

Sources of further information:

- ◆ The Infection Control Team – details below.
- ◆ Your General Practitioner (GP).
- ◆ Public Health England.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/clostridium-difficile-guidance-data-and-analysis>
- ◆ Patient Platform: <https://patient.info/health/clostridium-difficile-leaflet>

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Clostridium difficile Infection

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Clostridium difficile

What is it?

C. difficile (sometimes referred to as *C. diff*) is a spore-forming bacterium, which is present as one of the 'normal' bacteria in the gut of up to 3% of healthy adults.

C. difficile can cause illness when the balance of 'normal' bacteria in the gut is disturbed (commonly when antibiotics are being taken), and the bacteria are able to multiply. *C. difficile* produces a toxin that attacks the bowel lining.

What are the symptoms?

The effects of *C. difficile* can range from nothing, to diarrhoea of varying severity, and much more unusually to severe disease of the bowel. Diarrhoea commonly continues for 3 to 10 days.

Other symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, nausea, and abdominal pain or tenderness.

How is *C. difficile* infection diagnosed?

Infection is usually diagnosed by carrying out laboratory testing, which shows the presence of *C. difficile* toxins in the patient's faecal sample.

How can *C. difficile* be spread?

C. difficile bacteria and spores are spread by the faecal-oral route, meaning they pass out of the body via the faeces, and infect people via the oral route. Spores produced by the bacteria are very resistant, and can remain in the environment for long periods of time.

Spores can be transported on the hands of people who have had direct contact with infected patients or with environmental surfaces contaminated with *C. difficile*.

Therefore, excellent hand hygiene and cleaning of the environment are the key to preventing spread of infection.

Who is at risk?

The risk of disease increases in people:

- ◆ Over the age of 65
- ◆ With current or recent antibiotics
- ◆ With reduced immunity
- ◆ After gastrointestinal surgery
- ◆ With a serious underlying illness
- ◆ With long stays in healthcare settings

How can it be treated?

C. difficile can be treated with specific antibiotics. If an antibiotic the patient is taking is thought to have caused the problem, it will usually be stopped or an alternative one prescribed. It is also important for patients with diarrhoea to have adequate fluid intake.

Most people with a *C. difficile* infection make a full recovery.

What can we do to prevent the spread of *C. difficile*?

Patients

- ◆ If you are in hospital and experiencing diarrhoea with a suspected infectious cause, you will be nursed in a single room and you will also be allocated a toilet or a commode specifically for your use.
- ◆ If you are at home, you must ensure you wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before meals.
- ◆ Clean frequently touched hard-surfaces (e.g. door handles, toilet flushes) and toilets with products containing bleach. It is also important to keep surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas clean
- ◆ Laundry should be washed on a separate cycle, at the highest temperature that the fabric can withstand. Ensure hands are washed after handling soiled linen.
- ◆ As with any cause of diarrhoea, make sure you replace the fluids that are lost (due to the diarrhoea). You will probably need to drink more than you do usually.
- ◆ Do **NOT** take anti-diarrhoeal medicines as it is thought they may slow down the rate that your body will clear the toxins from your gut.

Visitors/family members

- ◆ Other people at home with you (or visiting you) must ensure they clean their hands with soap and water.
- ◆ Healthy people, are at very little risk of getting *C. difficile*.