
Clostridioides difficile (C.diff)

Infection prevention
and control

Patient Information



What is a C.diff infection?

Clostridioides difficile is a bacteria (germ) that can be found in your gut. You may hear it called *C.difficile* or *C.diff*.

Sometimes, because of taking antibiotics for your infection, the good bacteria within your gut can be killed off. However, C.diff can survive and in the absence of the good bacteria, it will multiply and produce toxins (poisonous substances) that can result in an infection. This bacteria is known to produce toxins that can affect the lining of your intestine, leading to an irritated bowel. The severity of the infection can vary from a mild to a severe infection but this depends on the individual. Symptoms may include abdominal pain, fever, cramping and diarrhoea.

How do you test for C.diff infections?

If you are experiencing diarrhoea without a clear reason why, a sample of your stool will be taken and sent to the hospital laboratories for testing. The healthcare team use a grading system to identify diarrhoea, called the Bristol Stool Chart. You may hear the teams refer to type 5, 6, 7 as diarrhoea. The test does not take long and usually results are available within a couple of days. If your bowel habits change, it is important to tell your healthcare team.

How do you treat C.diff infections?

In mild cases, you may not require treatment and the infection may resolve on its own. However, you might be given antibiotics specifically to treat the C.diff infection. The course of antibiotics is typically given for 10 days but this may vary depending on which antibiotic is prescribed. It is important to complete your course of antibiotics to avoid re-infection.

It is important that you do not become dehydrated, so remember to drink plenty of fluids. If you are taking laxatives, your doctor may stop these. You should notice your symptoms improving when starting the antibiotics. If they are getting worse or not improving, please discuss this with your medical team.



How is C.diff spread?

C.diff is spread through person-to-person contact. For example, hand to hand and hand to mouth.

C.diff can produce spores (reproductive cells) which are released during bowel movements. This means the bacteria can live for a long time on floors, surfaces, toilets and so on. These spores are resistant to general everyday cleaning detergents and chemical disinfectants, requiring specialist cleaning methods to eradicate them.

How do you prevent the spread of C.diff?

If you have a C.diff infection, you will be moved into a single room, ideally with an ensuite toilet. Nursing staff will wear aprons and gloves when they provide direct care or touch equipment around you. When you have been without diarrhoea for 48 hours, these precautions will stop.

Good hand hygiene is important to prevent spread of these spores. You should wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the bathroom, touching soiled linen and clothes, and before meals. It is important to note that anti-bacterial hand gels are **not** effective on C.diff spores although you may use it after your hands have been washed with liquid soap and water. All visitors should also ensure they follow the same practice and wash their hands thoroughly.

Will this affect my discharge date?

You will still be able to go home once you are well enough and medically fit for discharge. In some cases you may be asked to complete your course of antibiotics at home. Once you are at home, you should continue good hand hygiene practices and avoid sharing hand / bath towels until you are free from diarrhoea for at least 48 hours.

Contact details

If you would like more information, or if you have any questions/concerns about C.diff, please speak to your doctor or nurse. Alternatively, you can ask to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team on **020 8661 3917**.

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

For further information, please visit The Royal Marsden website: www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/your-care/support-services/royal-marsden-macmillan-hotline

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This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

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Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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