

## **Clostridium difficile Patient Information Leaflet**

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

The gut of healthy people contains many types of bacteria (germs) that usually cause no harm. C.diff is a bacteria that may be present in small numbers in the gut. Sometimes as a result of taking antibiotics some of the natural bacteria are killed off but C.diff survives and multiplies.

### **What does it cause?**

An increase of C.diff bacteria irritates the gut lining. Diarrhoea is the most common symptom, however, it may also cause abdominal pain, fever, loss of appetite and sickness and in severe cases a type of colitis (inflammation of the colon) called pseudo-membranous colitis.

### **Who is at risk of Clostridium difficile infection?**

- anyone taking certain types of antibiotics
- people in hospital, especially those over the age of 65
- people with inflammatory bowel disease
- people who have had surgery of the stomach and/or bowel
- people being treated for cancer, taking medication, or with illnesses that decrease the effectiveness of their immune (defence) system.

### **How long will the symptoms continue?**

This varies from person to person, but usually between 7-10 days. However, the symptoms may settle down within a couple of days. Sometimes the symptoms can reoccur after some time so it is important to see your GP if this should happen

### **How is it diagnosed?**

A stool (faeces) sample is sent to the laboratory to confirm if you have a C. diff infection. Once this is diagnosed the infection prevention nurse will visit you if you are in hospital and will give you a GREEN CDI card and information relating to C.diff infection. The green card must be shown to staff on any future hospital admissions or appointments that you have with healthcare.

### **How is it spread?**

Person to person contact is the main cause. It can be picked up on other people's hands and via hand to mouth contact transferring it into the gut. Anyone who comes into contact with you whilst you are poorly or in your environment must wash their hands with liquid soap and water.

### **How is it treated?**

Where possible any antibiotics you are taking will be stopped and your symptoms may subside without further treatment, but you might be given an antibiotic specifically to treat the C.diff infection. It is important that you do not become dehydrated, so remember to drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.

### **What can I do about it?**

The most important method of preventing spread is good hand hygiene. You must wash your hands with liquid soap and water or detergent hand wipes after you have been to the toilet and before eating your meals. Alcohol hand gel is **not** effective against C.diff. The C.diff spores can survive for long periods in the environment. Thorough cleaning will remove any spores from the contaminated environment.

### **What will be different about my care?**

Whilst you have symptoms, you will be moved to a single room to reduce the risk of spreading the infection to other patients. You may be assigned your own toilet or commode. Staff will wear gloves and aprons when caring for you.

When you have been free of diarrhoea for 48 hours these precautions will be stopped.

### **Will it affect my family or other visitors?**

It is not a risk to healthy people. If any of your visitors are concerned or feel they may be at risk they should ask a nurse or doctor for advice. Visitors must wash their hands before entering and leaving your room or ward if they are involved in the delivery of your care. If they are visiting another person in hospital as well as you, they must visit you last. Patients should not eat with relatives at the bedside or share food, as this will assist the transmission of the infection to others, as any food within the environment will be contaminated.

### **Can I still go home?**

You will not have to stay in hospital any longer than necessary. You will be allowed home as soon as you are fit to be discharged. If you are being discharged into a care home setting, you will be allowed to go once you have been symptom free for 48 hours. If returning to your own home the same hand hygiene practice must continue.

### **What will happen when I go home?**

It is advisable for everyone to always wash their hands before handling food, before eating, after using the toilet and handling soiled linen and clothing.

### **Recurrence of symptoms?**

There is a possibility that the infection and associated symptoms may return within the first 3 weeks following treatment. If your symptoms do return in your home environment you should consult your doctor for advice and appropriate treatment. A sample of faeces for investigation is not required.

Ensure that you show your GREEN CDI Card.

### **Whilst your symptoms persist please follow the advice below:**

- Personal hygiene is important.
- Hand hygiene must be performed before preparing or having meals, and after using the toilet.
- Separate hand towels should be used by the person affected and changed daily.
- The flush toilet handles and toilet door handles should be cleaned with detergent and water daily and after you have used the toilet.

Contact details  
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Further information can be found at <http://www.hpa.org.uk/topics>

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