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## **What is *Clostridioides difficile*?**

*Clostridioides difficile* (also known as *C. difficile* or *C. diff*) is a type of bacteria (germ) that causes diarrhea and colitis. Colitis is an inflammation of the colon.

## **Who gets *C. difficile*?**

*C. difficile* infection usually occurs when someone is taking antibiotics for something else or not long after they have finished. Other risk factors include older age (65+), previous *C. difficile* infection, having a weakened immune system, and recent stay at a hospital or nursing home.

## **How is *C. difficile* spread?**

*C. difficile* is found in stool and can live on people's skin. People who touch an infected person can pick up the germs on their hands. If they don't wash their hands, they can spread the germs to other people and things they touch.

## **What are the symptoms of *C. difficile* infection?**

The most common symptoms of a *C. difficile* infection are diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, and stomach pain or tenderness. Sometimes people carry *C. difficile* in their bodies without any symptoms. This is called being "colonized." A person can be colonized with *C. difficile* for a long time and never get sick or get sick much later.

## **How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?**

The exact timeframe is unknown. It can range from a few days to up to three months after exposure.

## How is *C. difficile* infection diagnosed?

A laboratory test of a stool sample can be used to diagnose *C. difficile* infection.

## What is the treatment for *C. difficile* infection?

*C. difficile* treatment usually involves taking a specific antibiotic for at least 10 days. If you were taking an antibiotic for another infection, your healthcare provider might ask you to stop taking it if it's safe to do so.

People with repeat *C. difficile* infections may receive a “fecal transplant”. This involves giving stool from a healthy person to the person with *C. difficile*. In severe cases, surgery might be needed to remove the infected part of the intestines.

## How can *C. difficile* infection be prevented?

You should always take antibiotics as prescribed. Wash your hands after using the bathroom and before you eat. If you've had a *C. difficile* infection, tell any healthcare professionals about it. This will help them make the best decisions when prescribing antibiotics in the future.

In healthcare settings, healthcare personnel wear a gown and gloves with caring for patients with *C. difficile*. This helps prevent the spread of *C. difficile* to themselves or to other patients. Special cleaning products are used to remove *C. difficile* from items and surfaces. Healthcare personnel practice frequent hand hygiene to limit the spread of *C. difficile*. Friends or family members visiting a patient with *C. difficile* should follow the healthcare facility's recommended precautions.

At home, if you or one of your household members has *C. difficile*:

- Wash your hands with soap and water every time after you use the bathroom and before you eat.
- Try to use a separate bathroom if you have diarrhea from *C. difficile*. If you can't, be sure the commonly touched surfaces in the bathroom are cleaned before others use it.
- Focus on regularly cleaning items that you touch with your hands, like doorknobs, refrigerator handles, and electronics.
- Wash linens, towels, and clothing from the person with *C. difficile* using the hottest water that is safe for those items. Use chlorine bleach if you can safely wash the items with it. Consider wearing gloves when handling dirty laundry and always wash your hands with soap and water after, even if you use gloves.

## How can I get more information about *C. difficile*?

- If you have concerns about *C. difficile*, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. You can find your local health department at [vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/](http://vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/).
- Visit the VDH *C. difficile* webpage at [vdh.virginia.gov/haiar/cdiff/](http://vdh.virginia.gov/haiar/cdiff/).

- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention *C. difficile* webpage at [cdc.gov/c-diff/about/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/c-diff/about/index.html).

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