

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile can cause diarrhoea when it replaces some of the normal bacteria that are found in the human gut. Most often it affects elderly people and those with other health problems.

How do I know that I have *Clostridium difficile*?

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by testing a sample of your faeces. This is usually at the request of your doctor.

How is it spread?

Clostridium difficile is found in large numbers in the stools of infected people. Person to person spread appears to be the main risk and poses a particular threat in hospitals and other care facilities. It can survive well in dust, and on surfaces and bed linen. These should be cleaned regularly to control the risk of contamination.

A common factor in those who develop *Clostridium difficile* diarrhoea is usually that they have recently had treatment with particular antibiotics. Frequently this is as a result of abdominal surgery. The risk of becoming ill with this organism is low in those who have not recently had a course of antibiotics.

The infection does not appear to be caused by eating or drinking contaminated food or water.

What are the symptoms?

Usually the main symptom is mild diarrhoea. This normally stops after a few days without the need for treatment.

Healthy people can often be infected with the bacteria without showing any symptoms.

Occasionally some people get frequent severe diarrhoea with mucus and sometimes blood present. Other symptoms may include abdominal pain, fever and vomiting.

The symptoms usually last for about 2-3 days.

Do infected people need to stay away from work or school?

All cases of gastroenteritis are regarded as potentially infectious. People should normally stay away from work or school until free from diarrhoea and vomiting. Inform your employer, child carer or school as soon as possible to help them identify if they may have an outbreak.

Anybody in a 'high risk' group needs to stay away long enough to allow the infection time to clear. This includes:

- food handlers involved with unwrapped or ready to eat food,
- staff of health care facilities in contact with food or patients,
- children aged below 5 years attending nurseries, playgroups, etc
- older children and adults who may find it difficult to implement good standards of personal hygiene

It is important to contact us if you, or anyone else in your household, are in one of these groups. People in these categories should not return to work, school or nursery until their symptoms have ceased and until their bowel habits have been normal for at least 48 hours. This is provided that they wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet.

How can I prevent it spreading?

Handwashing is the most important factor in preventing the spread of infection. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap in warm running water:

- AFTER using or cleaning the toilet
- AFTER touching anything contaminated by diarrhoea or vomiting
- AFTER attending to anybody who is unwell
- AFTER handling dirty laundry, clothing or bedding
- AFTER handling used nappies
- BEFORE handling, preparing, serving, or consuming food or drink

People who are ill should ideally use bactericidal liquid soap and separate towels or disposable paper tissues. A nailbrush can assist you to clean under your fingernails. Always dry your hands well as this helps to remove bacteria.

Cleaning the toilet

For as long as people are unwell:

- wipe the toilet seat with disinfectant after each use
- wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use.
- use a cloth soaked in disinfectant to wipe the toilet seat, flush handle, washbasin taps, and door handle two or three times a day.
- clean the toilet bowl using a (toilet) brush and disinfectant. Rinse the brush by flushing the toilet, and replace in its holder.
- keep any rubber gloves used for cleaning the toilet for this use only.
- flush the toilet with the seat and lid down.

Laundry

- keep dirty laundry from anyone with food poisoning separate
- if possible remove any heavy soiling into the toilet before washing
- wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on as hot a washing programme as possible without exceeding fabric care instructions.

Points to remember

- make sure everybody follows these precautions
- assist young children to wash their hands properly

REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY

Further advice is available by contacting your Doctor or from:

Cambridge City Council
Environmental Health & Waste Strategy
Mandela House
4 Regent Street
Cambridge
CB2 1BY

Tel: 01223 457900
Fax: 01223 457909



Cambridge City Council

CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED