

# Clostridium difficile

## What is it?

- *Clostridium difficile* is also known as *C. difficile* or *C. diff* and is one of the many bacteria found in the bowel (intestines) and the environment.

## How is it spread?

- *C. difficile* bacteria are found in the diarrhea of someone with an infection. People can be infected if they touch a surface covered with the bacteria and then touch their mouths. Surfaces can include toilets, bedpans, and bed railings. Contaminated hands can also spread the bacteria.
- *C. difficile* does not usually make healthy people sick.

## How does it make people sick?

- Certain antibiotics and high doses over a long period of time can change the normal levels of bacteria in your intestine. This can allow *C. difficile* to thrive and produce toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea.
- *C. difficile* infection is usually mild but can be severe.

## Who is at risk?

- People in health care settings.
- Older persons.
- People with severe underlying illness.
- Those taking certain antibiotics (especially over a long period of time).
- Those taking stomach ulcer drugs (proton pump inhibitors).

## What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms include diarrhea (mild or severe), nausea, fever, abdominal pain or tenderness and loss of appetite.

## How is it treated?

- Those with mild symptoms may not need treatment.
- For more severe infections, medication or surgery may be required.
- Do not use any over-the-counter drugs to stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium®).
- If diarrhea does not stop or comes back, contact your doctor.
- Be sure to drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated.

## What should I do at home?

### Hand Hygiene

- Wash your hands often for at least 15-20 seconds with soap and water, mainly after using the toilet and before eating or preparing meals.
- Caregivers should wash their hands after providing care.
- Wear gloves to handle body fluids or dirty items. Discard disposable gloves or clean rubber gloves after use.

### House Cleaning

- Remove any visible feces.
- Use an all-purpose household cleaner and follow the directions on the label.
- Wet the surface well and clean using good friction.
- Allow the surface to air dry.
- Wipe surfaces starting at the cleanest area and moving to the dirtiest area.
- Pay special attention to the toilet and sink.

### Cleaning clothes/other fabric

- Remove any visible feces.
- Wash items separately.
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap and dry in the dryer on high heat, if possible.
- Dry clean where appropriate.

### Cleaning Dishes

- Use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control Program staff at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext. 5229.

### References:

- Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Branch. (2014). Appendix A: *Clostridium difficile* Infection (CDI) outbreaks in public hospitals. Retrieved from: [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/nfdipro.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/nfdipro.aspx)
- Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee (PIDAC). (2013). Annex C: Testing, Surveillance and Management of *Clostridium difficile*. Retrieved from: [http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/BrowseByTopic/InfectiousDiseases/PIDAC/Pages/PIDAC\\_Documents.aspx](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/BrowseByTopic/InfectiousDiseases/PIDAC/Pages/PIDAC_Documents.aspx)
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