



Clostridium difficile



(‘C diff’)

What is clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile is a bacteria that can be found in the bowel of people who are both healthy and unwell. Approximately 3% of the population have harmless clostridium difficile in their bowel.

What is clostridium difficile infection?

Clostridium difficile can become harmful when present in large numbers. This usually happens when someone has taken antibiotics to treat another illness. Some antibiotics can disturb the normal balance of bacteria in the gut, allowing clostridium difficile to multiply. Clostridium difficile produces toxins which affect the lining of the bowel, causing symptoms of diarrhoea. A diagnosis is confirmed by sending a stool sample to the laboratory for analysis.

Symptoms of clostridium difficile infection include:

- mild to severe diarrhoea-often watery.
- stomach cramps.
- fever.
- loss of appetite.
- nausea.
- abdominal pain or tenderness.

Who is at risk of getting clostridium difficile infection?

- patients who are elderly and who have underlying health diseases are most at risk. More than 80% of cases are in people over 65 years of age.
- patients who have been treated with antibiotics.
- patients who have undergone gastrointestinal surgery.
- patients with an immune system which is not working properly, e.g. cancer patients.

How is clostridium difficile treated?

If clostridium difficile is diagnosed, any antibiotics you are currently taking may have to be stopped and a specific antibiotic active against clostridium difficile will be prescribed to treat the infection.

How do you catch it?

A person is at an increased risk of getting clostridium difficile if they are taking or have recently taken certain antibiotics.

Clostridium difficile produces spores which can live in the environment for a long time. These can be found on equipment, furniture or furnishings.

