

Patient information – infection control department

Clostridium difficile

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile is an infection caused by bacteria. It can cause stomach cramps and diarrhoea, and occasionally more serious conditions which affect the digestive tract or gut.

Infection from Clostridium difficile can occur after someone has taken antibiotics to treat another illness; this can disturb the normal balance of bacteria in the gut and allow the Clostridium difficile to multiply. Clostridium difficile produces toxins which can lead to diarrhoea and inflammation of the large bowel.

Symptoms of Clostridium difficile infection include:

- Mild to severe diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain or tenderness

Who is susceptible to Clostridium difficile infection?

Clostridium difficile lives in the gut of a small number of healthy people, but is mostly found in people who are unwell. 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.

Infection can occur in anyone who has:

- Previously been treated with antibiotics
- Previously undergone gastrointestinal surgery
- An immune system which is not working properly

How is Clostridium difficile diagnosed?

Obtaining a medical history of recent antibiotic treatment with subsequent diarrhoea can initiate increased levels of infection control precautions such as isolation of a patient in a single room to prevent the spread of infection. Diagnosis is by a stool sample which is sent to the laboratory for analysis.

How is clostridium difficile treated?

If Clostridium difficile is diagnosed, any current antibiotics may have to be stopped and a specific antibiotic will be prescribed to treat the infection.

How do you catch it?

Another person may acquire Clostridium difficile by ingesting the bacteria through contact with the contaminated environment.

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

As the spores live on surfaces, the risk of infection increases when people have diarrhoea which can then be spread from person to person through poor hygiene – failing to wash hands correctly after using the toilet, or after handling contaminated food.

How can you help?

You can help prevent the spread of infection by ensuring that your hands are washed thoroughly with soap and water after using the bathroom, before preparing and eating food, when visiting hospitals and care homes.

In order to protect yourself and other patients, please tell your nurse or doctor if you have experienced any symptoms of diarrhoea. They can then provide you with a specimen pot to use the next time you have diarrhoea.

If you have been diagnosed with Clostridium difficile, it is important to wash all dirty clothing, towels, sheets and bedding in the washing machine on the hottest cycle possible. It is important to clean the toilet seats, toilet bowls, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water followed by household bleach to help prevent the spread of Clostridium difficile infection.

How can I prevent the infection from recurring?

When you are prescribed antibiotics to treat Clostridium difficile it is important that the entire course of antibiotics is completed as directed. If you experience any difficulty with this it is important that you inform your doctor as soon as possible. If you continue to have diarrhoea either during or after you have completed your course of treatment you must inform your doctor as soon as possible.

Clean environment

We recognise the importance of keeping the environment clean and our domestic staff are dedicated to providing and maintaining a high standard of



cleanliness, which is monitored regularly by our clinical staff. When patients are in isolation for infection control reasons, the domestic staff will perform rigorous cleaning of the isolation room to ensure a high standard of cleanliness in order to prevent the spread of infection.

What can visitors do to help?

Do not visit the hospital if you have active symptoms of diarrhoea. Do not sit or lie on the patient's bed. If visiting a patient or relative who is being nursed in an isolation room, nursing staff will provide you with guidance on the correct method of hand hygiene using soap and water, and assist you with the use of apron or gloves if required.

Please adhere to this guidance

Further information can be found on the Public Health England website: www.hpa.org.uk or the NHS direct website: www.nhsdirect.NHS.uk.

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Phone: 020 7253 3411
www.moorfields.nhs.uk

Moorfields Direct telephone helpline

Phone: 020 7566 2345

Monday–Friday, 9am–9pm

Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

Phone: 020 7566 2324 or 020 7566 2325

Email: pals@moorfields.nhs.uk

Moorfields' PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks

Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further (see above). For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs.

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