

## Information on *Clostridium difficile* Infections

### What is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*)?

*Clostridium difficile* is a bacterium that causes diarrhea and more serious intestinal conditions such as colitis. It is sometimes called *C. diff*.

### What are *C. difficile* diseases?

They are diseases that result from *C. difficile* infections such as colitis, more serious intestinal conditions, sepsis, and rarely death.

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

Symptoms include:

- watery diarrhea (at least three bowel movements per day for two or more days)
- fever
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- abdominal pain/tenderness

### *C. difficile* colonization or infection?

Individuals who test positive for *C. difficile* bacteria or toxin, but who do not have watery diarrhea are considered colonized. This means they carry the bacteria in their digestive tract without causing illness. Testing for *C. difficile* should only be performed for symptomatic individuals on stool that conforms to the container in which it is collected.

### How is *C. difficile* disease treated?

*C. difficile* is generally treated for 10 days with antibiotics prescribed by your healthcare provider. The drugs are effective and appear to have few side-effects.

After treatment, repeat *Clostridium difficile* testing is not recommended if the patients' symptoms have resolved, as patients may remain colonized.

In some severe cases, a person might have to have surgery to remove the infected part of the intestines. This surgery is needed in only 1 or 2 out of every 100 persons with *C. diff*.

### How do people get *C. difficile* disease?

People in good health usually don't get *C. difficile* disease. People who have other illnesses or conditions requiring prolonged use of antibiotics and the elderly are at greater risk of acquiring this disease. The bacteria are found in the feces. People can become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with feces and then touch their mouth or mucous membranes. Healthcare workers can spread the bacteria to other patients or contaminate surfaces through hand contact.

### What should I do to prevent the spread of *C. difficile* to others?

If you are infected you can spread the disease to others. However, only people that are hospitalized or on antibiotics are likely to become ill. For safety precautions you may do the following to reduce the chance of spread to others:

- wash hands with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after using the restroom and before eating;
- clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas on a regular basis with household detergent/disinfectants.
- Only take antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor.
- If you are given a prescription to treat *C. diff*, take the medicine exactly as prescribed by your doctor and pharmacist. Do not take half-doses or stop before you run out.

### What should I do if I think I have *C. difficile* disease?

See your healthcare provider.