



## FACT SHEET: CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE (C. DIFFICILE)

**Clostridium difficile (C. difficile) is a spore forming bacteria that has been associated with outbreaks of diarrhea and colitis in hospital patients and long term care facility residents. It is one of the most common causes of infectious diarrhea in health care settings.**

### SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of C. difficile include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea

Most cases of C. difficile occur in people who are taking high doses of antibiotics which can destroy normal bowel bacteria and allow C. difficile to grow and thrive. C. difficile bacteria can produce toxins which can damage the bowel and may cause mild to severe diarrhea. Some people have C. difficile in their bowel without showing any symptoms.

People in good health are at low risk of acquiring C. difficile infection. Those who are on high doses of antibiotics for a prolonged period of time or who are hospitalized with a weakened immune system are at greatest risk of becoming ill.

### HOW IS IT SPREAD?

C. difficile bacteria and their spores are found in feces of infected people. They can contaminate

environmental surfaces such as toilets, sinks, handles, bedpans and commode chairs. Our hands can become contaminated after touching these surfaces. Infection can occur when we then touch our mouth without washing our hands. Our soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces. Therefore, proper hand hygiene is very important in preventing the spread of C. difficile infection.

### HOW IS C. DIFFICILE TREATED?

Treatment depends on how sick you are. People with no or mild symptoms may not require treatment. For more severe disease, medication and sometimes surgery may be needed.

### HOW DO YOU PREVENT INFECTION?

Hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent the transmission of infections. Hands should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water or an

continued ...

# C. difficile

(Page 2 of 2)

alcohol based hand rub (ABHR) after handling any contaminated waste (including diapers), before eating, feeding others, or providing personal care.

Health care workers and visitors to a health care setting should follow 'contact precautions' when providing care to a person with C. difficile infection to limit the spread of the illness to others. Often this requirement will be posted on a sign outside of the patient or resident's room.

Environmental surfaces in contact with a person with C. difficile infection should be regularly cleaned and disinfected.

## STEPS TO PROPER HANDWASHING

- Remove jewellery - rings may give germs a place to hide.
- Wet your hands with running water and apply liquid soap.
- Lather your hands by rubbing them together. Be sure to lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Rub your hands for at least 15 seconds (approximately as long as it takes to say your ABC's).
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a disposable paper towel.

## CLEANING AT HOME

Use an all-purpose household cleaner or disinfectant. Follow the instructions on the label and:

- Wet the surface well and clean using good friction.

- Allow the surface to air dry.
- Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with feces such as the toilet and sink.
- Remove any visible feces, and then clean as directed above.

## CLEANING DISHES

Dishes can be washed by hand with soap and water or with a dishwasher.

## CLEANING CLOTHES/OTHER FABRICS

Wash clothes/fabrics separately if they are heavily soiled with feces and:

- Rinse off feces.
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap.
- Dry items in the dryer on high heat, if possible.
- Dry clean where appropriate.

## REFERENCES

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Clostridium difficile [Internet]. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care; 2015. Available from: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/ccom/cdi/about.aspx#9>

Public Health Agency of Canada. Fact Sheet - Clostridium difficile [Internet]. Public Health Agency of Canada; 2014. Available from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/id-mi/cdiff-eng.php>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. FAQs about Clostridium Difficile [Internet]. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2015. Available from: [http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/pdfs/cdiff/Cdiff\\_tagged.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/pdfs/cdiff/Cdiff_tagged.pdf)

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. Infectious Disease Protocol, 2014. Appendix A: Disease Specific Chapters.

## MORE INFORMATION



### Southwestern Public Health

#### St. Thomas Site

519-631-9900

#### Woodstock Site

519-421-9901

**1-800-922-0096 | [www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca)**