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Infection, Prevention and Control Team

Information for patients diagnosed with Clostridium difficile (C-diff)

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile, often shortened to C-diff, is a bacterium (bug) which is found in the gut of a small number of healthy adults and children who may not have any signs of infection from it.

Infection mainly occurs after taking certain antibiotics which alters the gut flora (good bacteria) and allows C-diff bacteria to grow in number.

When patients suffer from diarrhoea and their stool (poo) sample grows C-diff it is called Clostridium difficile infection (CDI).

Some C-diff can produce toxins which leads to worsening diarrhoea and swelling of the bowel; patients will need treatment if this occurs.

How did I get C-diff?

C-diff is ingested (swallowed) and passed on when bacteria (spores) are released during bouts of diarrhoea.

You can become infected if you touch your mouth after touching furniture or equipment that have been covered in these spores.

This infection is also linked to the over use of antibiotics, so it is very important that antibiotics are taken and used appropriately.

People can also transfer the bacteria in healthcare premises and homes if they do not wash their hands properly or the environment is not kept clean.

What is the best way to clean my hands?

Hand washing is the most important method of reducing the spread of infection and C-diff bacteria.

Alcohol gel does not kill C-diff bacteria.

To make sure your hands are washed properly each time, you should:



- Wet your hands with warm water
- Apply liquid soap
- Wash your hands together – this should take about one minute
- Rinse your hands under running water
- Dry them with a disposable paper towel.



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How can I manage my CDI and diarrhoea?

You should keep a record of your diarrhoea episodes so that you can observe any improvement in your condition.

Once the diarrhoea has stopped for at least 48 hours and your bowel motion is back to normal you are not considered to be infectious.

There is no need for you to do another stool (poo) specimen as the bacteria can remain in your gut for a number of months without causing you any problems.

You should contact your General Practitioner (GP) or the local Infection Control Specialist Nurse if your symptoms do not improve within seven days or if it gets worse, as you may require a further course of antibiotics.

If there are signs of fever, acute pain or abdominal swelling outside of GP surgery hours you should contact the out of hours GP service informing them of your C-diff diagnosis.

What should I do when symptoms of diarrhoea have stopped?

- Thoroughly clean bathrooms with a bleach solution using a disposable cloth.
- Wipe areas around the house with a bleach type detergent especially door handles, chair arms.
- Clean any carpet spills with disposable cloths and neutral detergent (do not use bleach).
- Dispose of used cloths in your household waste.
- All equipment should be cleaned and disinfected.
- Wash bedding and towels on the hottest temperature the fabric will allow.

How can I help to stop the spread of CDI?

Antibiotics

Take treatment as prescribed by the GP; this is usually an antibiotic called Vancomycin for 10 days.

In your own home

If someone has symptoms of diarrhoea, they should stay at home until they have been clear of diarrhoea for 48 hours.

Crockery and cutlery

Wash them in hand hot soapy water; no additional precautions are required.

Cleaning

Clean toilets and bathrooms with a bleach solution (ratio one part bleach to ten parts water) or detergent containing bleach.

Use disposable cloths

Wipe high risk areas such as toilet bowls and door handles/grab rails with a detergent such as washing up liquid using a disposable cloth.



Waste

Dispose of any incontinence pads etc. into household waste (double bagged).

Laundry

- Wash bed linen and towels at 60°C.
- Tumble dry if possible and iron.
- Personal clothing - wash at the highest temperature the fabric allows.
- Do not wash with other household laundry.

GP, hospital or other care facilities

Avoid going to the GP, hospital or any care facility when suffering from diarrhoea. If this cannot be avoided and a GP appointment is needed, inform the GP so that a suitable appointment can be made.

Equipment

All equipment on loan should be cleaned with a bleach solution prior to returning to the Community Equipment Store.

Do not share any loaned equipment.

What if my symptoms are not settling?

If your symptoms of diarrhoea are not settling following completion of antibiotics, please contact your GP or Infection, Prevention and Control Nurse, as a further course of treatment or a different antibiotic may be needed.

DO NOT take any anti-diarrhoea medication such as Imodium.

The antibiotics you have been prescribed should help stop your diarrhoea.

Why have I been given a C-diff card?

You may have been given a 'green card' to alert other healthcare professionals about your CDI. This is only to help support better use of any future antibiotics which, if inappropriate, could restart this infection.

You only need to show this card to Doctors, Nurses, Dentists or your Pharmacist.

Can I have visitors?

Visitors are safe to visit you, but they should wash their hands when leaving your home.

Where can I get more advice and support?

Anyone who has had a diagnosis of CDI or who is caring for someone with this infection can contact the Bridgewater Trust Infection Prevention and Control team on the telephone number below:

01925 946 163

Further information can be read on line or downloaded from NHS Choices by going to www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx and searching the words 'Clostridium difficile'.



General information and advice

Diet

- Ensure plenty of drinks and fluids are taken, avoid fruit juices.
- Eat a light diet.
- Drinking probiotic drinks may help such as Actimel, Yakult, supermarket brand drinks.

Social activities

- Stay at home whilst suffering from diarrhoea.
- Once free from diarrhoea for 48 hours normal social activities can be returned to.

For impartial and confidential advice or information on the services provided by Bridgewater or to receive this leaflet in an alternative format call our Patient Services team on 0800 587 0562.

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