



Clostridium Difficile

What is Clostridium difficile and Clostridium difficile associated diarrhea (CDAD)?

Clostridium difficile (also known as *C. difficile*) is a bacterium that is commonly found in the environment. *C. difficile* may be present in our intestine without causing symptoms (colonization) or may cause severe diarrhea also known as *C. difficile* associated diarrhea (CDAD).

How is it spread?

C. difficile is mainly spread through the stool of someone who is sick with CDAD. After a bowel movement, you may get *C. difficile* on your hands. You can then pass it from your hands to anything you touch. A person can get *C. difficile* if they touch something that happens to have the bacterium on it, and then touch their mouth. This is why hand washing is so important. *C. difficile* can survive on objects for several months.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- watery diarrhea
- lower abdominal pain
- cramps and tenderness
- fever
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- general weakness

How is CDAD diagnosed?

A stool sample sent for testing will tell you if you are infected with *C. difficile*.

What is the treatment for CDAD?

If you have mild symptoms, you might not need treatment. If you are taking antibiotics, your doctor may tell you to stop taking them. Your symptoms usually go away. If you have more severe symptoms, antibiotics or surgery may be needed.

How do I protect myself and others?

You can help stop the spread of *C. difficile* infections by washing your hands after using the toilet, before preparing foods and before eating. Rigorously washing your hands for 15 seconds with soap and water is best.

Are there any special concerns about C. difficile?

Some people are at a higher risk of getting CDAD, such as adults who must be hospitalized for long periods, the elderly, and those who use certain antibiotics or antacids. Other groups at risk include those with serious illnesses, such as cancer, or those who have had surgery to the stomach or intestine. Children rarely get *C. difficile* infections.

If you live with people who are at higher risk of getting CDAD, you may need “contact precautions”. Your healthcare workers and visitors will be asked to wear gloves and gowns when caring for you. They will need to wash their hands when they enter and leave your room. You may have to stay in your room until you no longer have diarrhea. Contact precautions are needed to stop the spread of *C. difficile* and usually are only needed while you are having diarrhea.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809