

# ***Clostridium difficile***

## Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease  
Control and Prevention

An Office of the  
Department of Health and Human Services

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### **What is *Clostridium difficile* infection?**

*Clostridium difficile* infection (sometimes called *C. diff*) is caused by *Clostridium difficile* bacteria. Most cases of *C. diff* infection occur in people taking antibiotics.

### **How is it spread?**

*C. diff* produces spores which can live outside the body in the air or on objects for a long time. *C. diff* has been found in patient settings on objects such as bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, and medical equipment. *C. diff* infection can spread from person-to-person via contaminated equipment and a person's hands.

### **What are the symptoms of *C. diff* infection?**

Infection with *C. diff* can cause:

- watery diarrhea
- stomach cramping
- weakness
- dehydration
- fever
- nausea/vomiting.

### **Who is at risk of getting infected?**

People taking antibiotics, especially more than one, or for a long time, are at greatest risk. Elderly persons, hospital patients, those who live in a nursing home, and those with underlying medical conditions are also at high risk. A person can get *C. diff* more than once.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

*C. diff* is diagnosed with a lab test of the stool.

### **How is it treated?**

Antibiotics are used to treat *C. diff* infection. In rare cases when *C. diff* does not respond to antibiotics, fecal biotherapy may be done. This is when "healthy" stool is transplanted inside a *C. diff* patient.

### **How can *C. diff* infection be prevented?**

- Ask healthcare providers to wash their hands with soap and warm water before and after they care for you. Alcohol sanitizer does not destroy *C. diff* spores.

- Patients with *C. diff* will be on contact precautions. This means the patient is placed in a single room or with another patient at low risk. Providers and visitors wear gloves, gowns, mask, and wash their hands.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces with a 1:10 chlorine bleach product.
- Only take antibiotics when necessary.

### **Hospital isolation of *C. diff* patients:**

In a hospital, isolation can be stopped once the resident has formed stools for 24 hours.

### ***C. diff* patients in nursing facilities:**

Patients with *C. diff* should have a private bathroom or be assigned a commode. Products are available to contain the stool within the commode so there is less exposure. Residents and staff must wash their hands with soap and water, not alcohol hand sanitizer.

Patients who are able to walk but not mentally alert should be in a private room. Residents who are alert, have no fever, and whose stools are contained can attend group activities and meals. They must wash their hands before they leave their room to attend activities and before eating.

Cleaning of the resident's room and equipment, including walkers, wheelchairs, etc., lowers the chance of other residents becoming ill. Laundry should be handled with gown and gloves.

At home, clean with a cloth soaked in detergent first, then follow with new cloth soaked in diluted bleach solution. Home laundry should be done using hot water cycle and laundry soap. Dry the items in the dryer.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Contact your healthcare provider or local health center for more information. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or at [www.mainepublichealth.gov](http://www.mainepublichealth.gov). The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.