

Who do I contact with queries and concerns?

If you have any questions about your treatment or anything in this leaflet, please do not hesitate to ask a nurse or doctor on your ward. You can also contact the Infection Control Team at Barts and the London hospitals between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday via the switchboard on 020 7377 7000 or by email to: _infectioncontrolnurses@bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk

Where can I get more information about Clostridium difficile?

You can find out more about Clostridium difficile infection in the following ways:

- A leaflet called *A simple guide to Clostridium difficile* is available on the Department of Health website at: www.dh.gov.uk/hcai
- The Health Protection Agency has produced a questions and answers guide to *Clostridium difficile* at: www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/clostridium_difficile/gen_info.htm

Other useful external contacts

Health Protection Agency
www.hpa.org.uk

NHS Direct 0845 46 47 48
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Infection control at Barts and The London hospitals

We take infection control of all kinds very seriously. We have robust policies in place to reduce the risks of patients contracting infections while they are in one of our hospitals. For more information about how we protect patients against infections, please visit our website: www.bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk/forpatients/protecting_against_infection.asp

Barts and The London NHS Trust
Switchboard: 020 7377 7000
www.bartsandthelondon.nhs.uk

For internal use only:
Author: Infection Control Nurses
Contact details: 020 3246 0294
Publication date: March 2007. Updated October 2009
Reference: BLT/PTINFO/171

Information

Clostridium Difficile infection

An information leaflet for patients and visitors



What is Clostridium Difficile?

Clostridium Difficile (known as *C. difficile* or *C. diff*) is a type of bacteria that is present in the large intestine (gut) of up to 3% of healthy adults and 66% of infants. However, *C. difficile* rarely causes problems in children or healthy adults, as it is kept in check by the normal bacteria of the gut.

C. difficile infection occurs when the normal balance of bacteria in the bowel is altered, allowing *C. difficile* to flourish and produce toxins that can cause watery diarrhoea and inflammation of the bowel.

How do you get it?

It is possible for the infection to spread from person to person because those suffering from *C. difficile* associated disease shed spores in their faeces.

Spores are very hardy forms of the bacteria that can survive for long periods in the environment. Cross infection with these spores can occur through direct patient to patient contact, via healthcare workers or via a contaminated environment (e.g. toilet areas, equipment, commodes, etc). If the spores are ingested (swallowed) the patient is then at risk of getting *C.difficile* infection.

Are certain patients more at risk of getting it?

Patients who are receiving antibiotics are more at risk as antibiotics can alter the normal bacteria in the bowel, allowing *C.difficile* to multiply. Older patients and those with poor immune systems who are taking antibiotics are at particular risk.

Repeated enemas and/or stomach or bowel surgery may also increase a person's risk of developing the disease.

What are the symptoms of *C. difficile* infection?

C.difficile infection causes diarrhoea which may vary from being mild to severe. Other symptoms can include temperature, loss of appetite, feeling sick and

stomach (bowel) pain or tenderness. On rare occasions there can be severe inflammation of the bowel. Occasionally, infection in these circumstances may be life-threatening.

How is *C. difficile* infection diagnosed?

The infection is normally diagnosed by testing faeces to see if *C. difficile* toxins are present.

How can it be treated?

C. difficile infection can be treated with specific antibiotics.

If you are taking antibiotics for another infection your doctor will review whether these need to continue as they may be contributing to the *C. difficile* infection.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids when you have diarrhoea to prevent dehydration (loss of fluid from the body).

Other treatments may be tried, including pro-biotic treatments ('good bacteria'), with the aim of re-establishing the normal bacteria in the gut.

What can 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 in hospital or on antibiotics are likely to become ill.

Wash your hands with soap and water regularly, especially after using the toilet or commode and before eating.

How do hospitals prevent the spread of *C. difficile*?

Staff will wash their hands before and after contact with infected patients. They will wear disposable gloves and aprons when caring for infected patients. Infected patients will usually be moved to a single room.

The surrounding environment will be thoroughly cleaned with a detergent and a suitable disinfectant.

Equipment shared between patients, for example, blood pressure cuffs, commodes and drip stands, will be cleaned between each use.

The sensible use of antibiotics in hospital also helps to reduce the occurrence of *C. difficile* infection.

Can I have visitors?

Yes, you can have visitors. Healthy people are at little risk of getting *C. difficile*. However, your visitors must wash their hands on arrival and before leaving the ward. This must be done using soap and water as alcohol hand rub is not effective against *C. difficile*.

Can my washing be sent home?

Yes, laundry can be sent home. Any soiled laundry should be washed separately and at a temperature of 60°C (if the fabric will withstand this). Alternatively, wash it at the highest temperature according to the fabric care label on the longest programme. Then dry and iron.

Can I go home with *C. difficile*?

Yes, if your medical team are satisfied that you are fit for discharge. They will let you know if you need to continue treatment at home.

Can it come back?

Unfortunately, you can suffer a relapse of diarrhoea. Contact your GP if you develop diarrhoea after discharge from hospital and let them know that you have had *C.difficile* associated diarrhoea.