

Information Sheet – Patient, Resident and Family Information about *Clostridium difficile*

WHAT IS *Clostridium difficile* (also known as *C. difficile* or *C. diff*)?

C. diff is one of the many kinds of bacteria that can be found in stool (bowel movement).

WHAT IS *C. diff* INFECTION (CDI)?

C. diff is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospitals or long-term care (LTC) facilities.

CDI occurs when antibiotics kill the good bacteria in your bowel and allow the *C. diff* bacteria to grow. When *C. diff* grows it produces toxins (poisons). These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. *C. difficile* infection is usually mild, but can be severe. In extreme cases, patients/residents may need surgery. *C. diff* may even cause death.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF *C. diff*?

The usual symptoms are watery diarrhea, fever, and abdominal pain.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR *C. diff*?

- anyone with a recent history of antibiotic use
- persons (especially older or debilitated patients/residents) in hospital or long-term care
- persons with other bowel diseases or who have had bowel surgery
- persons on chemotherapy for cancer

HOW DO YOU TREAT *C. diff*?

Treatment depends on how sick you are with *C. difficile* infection. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. People with more severe disease may need to be treated with a special antibiotic that kills the *C. diff* bacteria.

HOW IS *C. diff* SPREAD?

1. When a person has *C. diff*, the bacteria in the stool can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans or commode chairs.
2. When touching these items our hands can become contaminated.
3. If we then touch our mouths without washing our hands, we can become infected.
4. Our soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF *C. diff* IN HOSPITALS?

If you have *C. diff*, special precautions will be taken to prevent it from spreading to other patients/residents in the facility. These precautions include:

- Single room accommodation if possible (the door can remain open).
- A sign posted outside your door to remind others who enter your room about the need for special precautions.

- Everyone who cares for you must wear a long-sleeved gown and gloves.
- Your activities outside the room may be restricted.
- Everyone **MUST** wash their hands when leaving your room.
- You must wash your hands after using the bathroom and before leaving your room.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AT HOME?

Healthy people are at very low risk. This includes your family and friends who are not taking antibiotics.

Hand Hygiene

- Everyone who might help you with your personal hygiene or with going to the toilet should wash their hands after assisting you.
- Wash your hands after you go to the bathroom, after handling soiled laundry, and before preparing meals or eating food.

Cleaning the house

Step 1: Use a regular household cleaner (according to the instructions on the label) to clean commonly touched hard surfaces in the home (e.g., faucets, door handles, countertops, etc.). Pay special attention to areas (such as the toilet) that may be heavily soiled with stool and make sure to really rub and scrub the surfaces!

Step 2: Disinfect the same surfaces using a diluted chlorine bleach solution (i.e., household bleach diluted with water)

1. Dilute 1 part bleach with 9 parts water.
2. Wet the surface well (the surface must stay wet for at least 10 minutes) with a clean cloth dipped in the bleach solution and wipe using good friction. **DO NOT RINSE.**
3. Allow the surface to air dry.

Cleaning clothes

For clothes that are heavily soiled with stool:

1. Rinse stool off or dispose of stool in the toilet.
2. Wash separately from other household laundry in a hot water cycle with soap.
3. Dry items in the clothes dryer if possible.

Cleaning dishes

Dishes and cutlery should be washed with normal household dishwashing products.

Taking medication

It is very important that you take all of your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should **NOT** take any medications (e.g., Immodium) that will stop your diarrhea.

Sources:

Saskatoon Health Region Infection: Prevention and Control Fact Sheet (*C. difficile*) 2007.
PIDAC Sample Patient Information: *Clostridium difficile* 2010.