Clostridium difficile (C. diff)

What is C. diff?
C. diff is a type of bacteria (germ) that is found in the intestine (gut or bowel) and stool (poop).

How does someone get C. diff?
We all have different types of bacteria in our bowel. This is normal and healthy. The balance of normal bacteria in the bowel may change when we take antibiotics. This may allow C. diff bacteria to grow more than usual.

When this happens, the C. diff bacteria make toxins that can irritate the bowel and cause diarrhea. This diarrhea is highly contagious.

You are at risk of getting C. diff if you:

- are taking antibiotics
- are elderly
- are having chemotherapy
- have had bowel surgery or have bowel disease
- have other illnesses
What are the symptoms of *C. diff*?

*C. diff* may cause:

- frequent watery bowel movements (diarrhea)
- fever
- loss of appetite
- nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- abdominal (stomach) pain

How is *C. diff* treated?

Sometimes *C. diff* can be treated just by stopping all antibiotics and letting the bacteria return to normal on their own.

Your doctor may order another type of antibiotic to treat the *C. diff*. After treatment, *C. diff* may return. If your diarrhea comes back, contact your family doctor or other health care provider, who will decide if you need more treatment.

What happens in the hospital?

Health care providers will take extra steps to prevent spreading *C. diff* to other patients. These extra steps are called “Contact Precautions.”

- A “Contact Precautions” sign will be placed outside your room.
- Health care providers may wear a gown, gloves or a mask when they take care of you or handle items in the area around your bed.
• If you are not in a private room, a commode chair (portable toilet) will be placed at your bedside for your use only.

• The staff who clean your room will need to disinfect all surfaces around your bed and your bathroom more often.

• Health care providers will clean their hands often with soap and water.

• You should clean your hands with soap and water after every bowel movement and before eating, drinking or taking medications.

• While you are having symptoms you may be asked not to visit other areas of the facility. Your health care provider will talk about this with you.

• You, your family and visitors should not use the kitchen areas or ice machines on the nursing unit. Ask a staff member to help you.

• Nurses may need to look at your stool and collect samples for testing. Please tell your nurse when you are having bowel movements.

• Contact Precautions may be stopped when you have at least 48 hours without diarrhea.

• If you have a weak immune system, Contact Precautions may be in place for a longer time.
Can I still have visitors?
Yes. Visitors should:

- Clean their hands before and after visiting, and before and after helping with your care. They may be asked to wear a gown and gloves if providing care.
- **Never** use your washroom in the hospital. There are other washrooms for visitors. Please ask if you need directions.
- **Not** visit other patients in the hospital after visiting you.
- Stay home if they are feeling sick.

What happens when I go home?
Always clean your hands with soap and water after using the washroom and before eating. Clean washrooms and kitchens regularly with household disinfectants or a solution of 1 cup household bleach to 9 cups cold tap water (make a new mixture each day).

Wash clothing separately if it is soiled with stool:
- Rinse the stool off into the toilet.
- Wash in hot water with detergent.
- Dry in a hot dryer if possible.
Outpatient visits (clinics)
If you come to the hospital for an appointment and you are having diarrhea, make sure you clean your hands with the alcohol-based hand rub provided at the registration desk. Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the washroom.

Questions?
If you need more information, please ask your health care provider or ask to talk with an Infection Control Practitioner.

Notes: