

Clostridioides difficile (*C. diff*)

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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 gut. This is normal and healthy. Sometimes when we take antibiotics, our gut makes more *C. diff*. This can make toxins that irritate (bother) your bowel and cause you to have diarrhea (loose, watery poop.) This type of diarrhea is very contagious (easy to spread to other people).

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

- › are taking antibiotics.
- › are elderly.
- › are having chemotherapy.
- › have had bowel surgery or have a bowel disease.
- › have other chronic (ongoing) conditions.

What are the symptoms of *C.diff*?

C. diff may cause:

- › Frequent diarrhea
- › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- › Loss of appetite (not feeling hungry)
- › Nausea (upset stomach)
- › Stomach pain

How is *C.diff* treated?

- *C.diff* may be treated by stopping all antibiotics. This lets the bacteria in your gut return to normal on their own.
- Your doctor may order another type of antibiotic to treat the *C.diff*.
- After treatment, diarrhea may return. **If this happens, call your primary health care provider or other health care provider.** They will decide if you need more treatment.

What will happen in the hospital?

Health care providers will take extra steps to prevent *C. diff* from spreading 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, and/or a mask when they take care of you or touch 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.
- Staff who clean your room will disinfect all surfaces around your bed and your bathroom more often.
- Health care providers will clean their hands often.
- **You should clean your hands with soap and water** after every time you use the washroom, and before eating, drinking, or taking medication(s).
- While you are having symptoms, you may be asked not to visit other areas of the building. Your health care provider will talk about this with you.
- **You, your essential care partners, and your visitors should not use the kitchen areas or ice machines while you are admitted.** Ask a staff member to help you.

- Your nurses may need to look at your poop and collect samples for testing. Please tell your nurse when you need to use the washroom.
- Contact Precautions may be stopped once you have had treatment and are no longer having diarrhea.
- If you have a weak immune system, Contact Precautions may be in place for a longer time.

Can I still have visitors?

Yes. Essential care partners and visitors should:

- › clean their hands before and after visiting, and before and after helping with your care.
- › wear a gown and gloves if providing care for you.
- › **never** use your washroom. 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 will happen 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 the following cleaning mixture. Do this until you no longer have diarrhea and you feel well.

Cleaning mixture:

Mix 1 cup of household bleach with 9 cups of cold tap water. Make a new mixture each day.

Wash clothes separately if they are soiled with diarrhea:

- Rinse waste off into the toilet.
- Wash the clothes 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 have diarrhea, make sure you tell your health care provider.
- 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.

If you would like more information, please ask a member of your health care team.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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