

Preventing *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*) Infection

What is *Clostridioides difficile* infection?

Clostridioides difficile [pronounced Klos-TRID-e-OY-dees dif-uh-SEEL], also known as “*C. diff*” [See-dif], is a germ that infects the intestines and can cause diarrhea. Most cases of *C. diff* infection occur in patients taking antibiotics. The most common symptoms of a *C. diff* infection include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Belly pain and tenderness

Who is most likely to get a *C. diff* infection and how is it spread?

The elderly and people with certain medical problems have the highest risk of getting a *C. diff* infection. *C. diff* spores can live outside the human body for a very long time and may be found in the environment such as on bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, and medical equipment. *C. diff* infection can spread from person-to-person on dirty equipment and by the hands of patients, doctors, nurses, other healthcare providers, and visitors.

How is a *C. diff* infection treated?

There are antibiotics that can be used to treat *C. diff* infection. In some severe cases, a person might have to have surgery to remove the infected part of the intestines. Surgery is not common and is needed in only 1 or 2 out of every 100 persons with *C. diff* infection.

Can my family and visitors get *C. diff* when they visit me?

C. diff infection usually does not occur in people who are not taking antibiotics. Healthy visitors are not likely to get *C. diff* when they visit you.

How is Michigan Medicine preventing *C. diff* infections?

- All staff clean their hands before and after caring for a patient. This can prevent *C. diff* and other germs from being passed from one patient to another by staff's hands.
 - Staff will clean their hands with soap and water after caring for a patient with *C. diff* because *C. diff* spores cannot be removed or killed with hand sanitizer. Washing with soap and water physically removes any *C. diff* spores from their hands.
- All hospital rooms and medical equipment used by patients with *C. diff* are carefully cleaned and properly disinfected.
- **Contact Precautions-D (CP-D)** is a method used to prevent *C. diff* from spreading to other patients. Patients on Contact Precautions-D will have an **orange sign** posted outside their room. Contact Precautions-D mean:
 - Staff will put on gloves and wear a gown over their clothing while taking care of patients with *C. diff*.
 - Before leaving the room, staff will remove their gown and gloves and wash their hands with soap and water.
 - For more information, ask your nurse for the Contact Precautions general information sheet.
- Healthcare providers will only give patients antibiotics when it is necessary.



Infection Prevention and Epidemiology
C. Diff Infection

What can I do to help prevent *C. diff* infections?

- Ask staff to clean their hands before and after caring for you. Soap and water is the most effective and should always be used after providing care.
- Ask your family and visitors to clean their hands before and after visiting you. They can use hand sanitizer when they enter your room but it is important that they use soap and water to clean their hands when leaving.
- Only take antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor.
- Be sure to wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
- When on Contact Precautions-D, you should stay in your room as much as possible. You should not go to common areas such as the gift shop, cafeteria or Child Life, but you can go to other areas of the hospital for treatments and tests.
 - If you do leave your room for treatments or tests, wear clean clothing or a clean gown, and wash your hands with soap and water before leaving your room.

What can my family and visitors do to prevent the spread of *C. diff* when they visit me?

- Read and follow any signs posted outside your door.
- Clean their hands before they enter your room and as they leave your room.
 - Family and visitors must wash their hands with soap and water when they leave your room to effectively remove *C. diff* spores.
- Ask your nurse if they need to wear protective gowns and gloves when they visit you.
 - It is recommended that all family/visitors wear gloves and a gown if they will be participating in patient care activities. Wearing a gown will reduce the spread of germs out of the room on their clothing.
 - Family/visitors must remove gowns and gloves and wash hands with soap and water before leaving the room.
- While you are on Contact Precautions-D your family and visitors cannot go into the nourishment room or to any Child Life areas. They should ask your

nurse if they have any questions regarding where they are allowed to go in the hospital.

What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

Once you are home, you can return to your normal routine. Often, the diarrhea will be better or completely gone before you go home. This makes giving *C. diff* to other people much less likely. There are a few things you should do, however, to lower the chances of developing *C. diff* infection again or spreading it to others:

- If you receive a prescription to treat *C. diff* take the medicine exactly as prescribed by your doctor and pharmacist. Do not take half-doses or stop before you run out.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after going to the bathroom and before preparing food.
- People who live with you should wash their hands often as well.
- Use bleach-based disinfectants to clean bathrooms.
- If you develop more diarrhea after you get home, tell your doctor immediately.
- Your doctor may give you additional instructions.

If you have questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

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Adapted from: SHEA. FAQ's about Clostridium difficile. Access at: <http://www.shea-online.org>

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