

C. dif (*Clostridium difficile*)

Information for Patients – Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

What is C. dif?

Clostridium difficile (C. dif) is a germ that causes diarrhea and more serious intestinal conditions such as colitis.

Who gets C.dif?

People in good health usually don't get C dif disease. People more likely to get C. dif are those who:

- Have taken antibiotics
- Have had cancer treatment
- Have had recent abdominal surgery
- Have other stomach or intestine problems
- Are already sick and in the hospital

How do people get C. dif disease?

C. dif forms spores, which can survive on surfaces for months. People can become infected with C.dif if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with the germ and then touch their mouth or mucous membranes.

How do we prevent the spread of C. dif?

Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Thorough hand washing requires soap and running water, and should take at least 15 seconds.

What precautions do hospitals take to prevent the spread of C. dif?

In a hospital, health care workers take many precautions to prevent spreading infection. Staff wash their hands, use hand sanitizer, and wear gloves to protect patients from germs. Equipment and surfaces are disinfected regularly with hospital-grade disinfectant.

When a patient has C dif, additional precautions are taken in the hospital. These precautions, called "**Contact Isolation**", help prevent spreading C. dif to other patients, or to other areas within the hospital. This is very important for patients who are already weakened from illness and are more likely to develop an infection.

What are Contact Isolation Precautions?

Contact Isolation Precautions are special precautions that help prevent the spread of germs. Some of the practices are listed below:

- You may be required to stay in your room.
- Everyone who enters the room and cares for you will wear gloves and a gown. This will prevent them from carrying the germ out of the room.
- It is very important for all persons entering and leaving the room to wash their hands.
- A Contact Precautions sign will be posted outside your room to alert staff and visitors of the necessary precautions.

What about family and visitors?

You can still have visitors in your room, but they must follow the practices for Contact Isolation Precautions. All visitors will be asked to wear a gown and gloves while in the room. They should remove them and wash their hands before leaving the room.

If I have C dif, what can I do at home to prevent the spread of this germ?

- **Talk to your doctors.** If you have ever had a C dif infection, tell all of your health care providers.
- **Follow your health care provider's instructions.** If your doctor gives you antibiotics, take them exactly as prescribed. Do not stop early, even if you feel better. The last few pills kill the toughest germs. Never take antibiotics without a prescription from your doctor.
- **Wash your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash hands often with soap and warm water, especially before eating and after using the washroom.
- **Clean surfaces.** Clean frequently-used areas of your home (bathrooms, kitchen countertops, etc.) regularly with a household cleaner/disinfectant.
- **Launder items regularly.** Wash soiled sheets, towels and clothes with regular laundry detergent and hot water. Dry clothes in a hot dryer until completely dry, rather than air-drying.
- **Let your doctor know.** If diarrhea returns, tell your doctor *immediately*. C. dif can come back, even after you feel better.

If I have C dif, is it safe to be near my family members?

Yes, but you do need to take precautions. Washing your hands frequently is the best way to avoid spreading C. dif. Closely follow the precautions listed above. Make sure your family members wash their hands, too.