

Frequently asked questions about *Clostridium difficile*

Q: What is *Clostridium difficile*?

A: *Clostridium difficile* is a toxin-producing bacterium that can cause symptoms ranging from diarrhea to life-threatening inflammation of the colon.

Q: Who is most likely to get *Clostridium difficile*?

A: Illness from *Clostridium difficile* most commonly affects older adults in hospitals or in long-term care facilities and typically occurs after use of antibiotic medications.

Q: How do antibiotics contribute to developing *Clostridium difficile*?

A: Your intestines contain millions of bacteria, many of which help protect your body. But when you take an antibiotic to treat an infection, the drug can destroy some of the normal, helpful bacteria as well as the bacteria causing the illness. This disruption allows *Clostridium difficile* to invade, multiply and cause symptoms.

Q: How do I know if my symptoms are related to *Clostridium difficile*?

A: A stool test is required for diagnosis.

Reference:
APIC Implementation Guide to Preventing Clostridium difficile Infections, 2013
www.apic.org/implementationguides

Lifesaving tip:
Proper hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infection.

Please contact the ANMC Infection Control office at (907) 729-2921 if you have any questions.



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Clostridium difficile: Preventing Infections at Home



Why is this important?

- *Clostridium difficile*, commonly known as “C. diff,” is a bacterium that can cause a very severe infection.
- Symptoms include watery diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, and abdominal pain and cramping. If you do not have diarrhea, it is unlikely that you have a *Clostridium difficile* infection. Please note that diarrhea is a common side effect of antibiotics; however, if you have severe diarrhea and abdominal cramping, that is not a normal side effect.
- *Clostridium difficile* bacteria are passed in feces and spread to food, surfaces and objects when people who are infected don't wash their hands thoroughly. The bacteria produce spores that can survive in a room for weeks or months.
- People can be exposed to *Clostridium difficile* by touching objects that have been soiled with feces.
- *Clostridium difficile* can make other people sick if they touch their mouth or eat or prepare food without careful attention to proper hand washing and cleaning.

Safety precautions for your home

- Keep yourself clean. Wash your hands with soap and water, especially after going to the bathroom, before preparing food and before eating.
- Use disposable cloths or paper towels for hand drying.
- Clean all of the surfaces in your home with chlorine bleach-based sprays or wipes.
- Clean door knobs, sinks, toilets, flush handles, kitchen counters, light switches and any surfaces you touch.
- Soiled linen should be handled as little as possible and washed separately. Normal washing and drying cycles, including “hot” or “cold” cycles are adequate.



Safety precautions for visiting or caring for someone with *Clostridium difficile*

- When visiting someone with *Clostridium difficile*, wash your hands with soap and water **every time** you enter and exit the room.
- Wear gloves if you are likely to have direct contact with feces. All surfaces should be carefully disinfected with a product that contains chlorine bleach. *Clostridium difficile* spores can survive routine cleaning products that don't contain bleach.