

## *Clostridium difficile*

### **What Is *Clostridium difficile*?**

*Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) is a hardy bacteria found in the stool. Sometimes *C. difficile* causes infection in a person. Symptoms of infection can include:

- ✓ loose or watery diarrhea
- ✓ fever
- ✓ loss of appetite
- ✓ abdominal pain and cramps.

### **Who Gets A *C. difficile* Infection?**

When the normal bacteria in the bowel are disrupted, *C. difficile* can begin to produce toxins. Things that disrupt normal bacteria in the bowel are:

- ✓ Antibiotics.
- ✓ Chemotherapy.
- ✓ Abdominal surgery.
- ✓ Stomach or intestinal problems.

### **How is *C. difficile* diagnosed?**

The doctor will ask the nurse to send a sample of stool to the laboratory to check for *C. difficile* toxins. If the lab test shows *C. difficile* toxins in the stool, it is reported as positive.

### **How Are *C. difficile* Infections Treated?**

*C. difficile* infections are treated

- ✓ With special antibiotics (for example Metronidazole, Vancomycin).
- ✓ By taking only antibiotics prescribed by a doctor.
- ✓ By taking Probiotics (helps to restored normal bowel bacteria-for example Lactobacillus).
- ✓ By using antidiarrhea medicine only when your doctor prescribes it.

### **How Is *C. difficile* Spread?**

*C. difficile* is very infectious. Patients with *C. difficile* diarrhea shed spores in the stool that can be spread from person to person or to objects in the room. When an infected person touches an object, *C. difficile* spores can spread to the object. *C. difficile* may be found on toilets, sinks, furniture, personal items and health care equipment that an infected patient uses. Others who touch these items can soil their hands. This is how the illness passes from person to person.

## How Is The Hospital Stay Different For A Patient With A *C.difficile* Infection?

Special practices will be used to prevent the spread of *C. difficile*. These practices are called “Contact Precautions”. These precautions include:

- A private room.
- Patients with *C. difficile* need to stay in the room.
- Health care staff will wear gloves and sometimes gowns when giving care.
- Everyone needs to clean their hands before entering and leaving the room.
- Hand washing is the preferred way to clean hands. Alcohol hand rubs may be used when soap and water are not accessible.
- Signs will be put on the door to remind everyone to follow “Contact Precautions”.
- Nurses will review any additional precautions with the patient.

## What Special Things Need To Be Done When A Patient With A *C.difficile* Infection Goes Home?

- ✓ If the patient no longer has diarrhea, no special precautions need to be done. Clean hands are always important.
- ✓ If the diarrhea continues at home:
  - Patients need to clean their hands after using the toilet and before eating.
  - Family members, who help care for the patient, need to clean their hands.
  - Hands can be cleaned with soap and water or with an alcohol hand rub.
  - Family members need to wear disposable gloves if they handle stool or items soiled with stool.
  - Clean the toilet seat after each use with a disinfectant such as Lysol.
  - Launder bedding and clothing soiled with stool, according to the manufacturer’s directions. Clothes and linen not soiled with stool, can be washed with other items.
  - Put disposable wastes (for example diapers) into plastic bags. Tie bags securely and place in regular trash.

## What Can A Patient With *C. difficile* Infection Do To Help Prevent The Spread Of *C. difficile* ?

- ✓ Patients with a *C. difficile* infection need to clean their hands before eating and after use of the toilet. This is the most important thing they can do. Hand washing is the preferred way to clean hands. Alcohol hand rubs may be used when soap and water are not accessible.
- ✓ Take antibiotics only when a doctor prescribes them.