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C. diff

Clostridioides difficile (C. diff) are bacteria (bugs) that live in the gut.

C. diff spreads more easily inside a hospital. It is less likely to harm you if you are well enough to be at home.

Most of the time C. diff are harmless in healthy people.

If C. diff grows too much in your bowel, it can cause infection and make you very sick.

How you get C. diff

You can get C. diff from contact with:

- someone with a C. diff infection
- a toilet seat with C. diff on it

If you get C. diff on your hands, it can get into your mouth when you eat or drink. It can then start to grow in your bowel. Often this does not cause any illness.

If you have C. diff in your bowel, it will come out of your body in your poo (faeces).

The bacteria can survive for long periods on hands and surfaces, for example:

- toilet seats
- table tops
- beds
- floors
- clothing

If you've had a C. diff infection

If you are in hospital and you had a C. diff infection in the past, tell your doctor and nurse.

Preventing C. diff infection

To stop getting and spreading C. diff:

- [clean your hands often](#)
- clean your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet and before eating
- use your own soap, flannel, sponge and razor

If you are in hospital:

- limit contact with other patients and keep away from their bed space
- avoid sharing food, newspapers or other personal items with other patients
- tell staff if facilities in a hospital or clinic are not clean

Visitors must clean their hands thoroughly before and after they see you. They should not sit on your bed.

Causes of C. diff infection

Things that increase your risk of becoming ill with a C. diff infection include:

- [antibiotics](#) - you are more than likely to become ill if you are taking antibiotics for a long time
- drugs that block production of stomach acid such as proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)
- being over 65
- long-term kidney disease
- abdomen surgery
- having a nasogastric tube (a tube placed in your stomach)

Diagnosing C. diff infection

If you become ill with symptoms that may be caused by C. diff, a sample of your poo (faeces) will be sent to a lab for testing.

Symptoms of C. diff infection

Common symptoms of C. diff infection include:

- diarrhoea - varies from mild and watery to very severe and sometimes has a very bad smell
- feeling sick (nausea)
- a high temperature (fever)
- loss of appetite

Some people who are very sick can have blood in their poo and get very severe bloating of the abdomen.

Having diarrhoea while taking antibiotics does not always mean you have a C. diff infection. Diarrhoea can be caused by a number of conditions and is a common side effect of antibiotics.

Treatment of C. diff infection

Drink plenty of fluids so you do not become dehydrated because of the diarrhoea.

If the infection is mild, you should be able to recover at home.

If an antibiotic caused the C. diff infection, your doctor may:

- stop your antibiotic treatment
- give you a different antibiotic to treat the C. diff infection

Sometimes the C. diff infection will settle down on its own if your doctor can stop all antibiotics.

Infections usually respond well to treatment. Most people make a full recovery in a week or two. But symptoms can come back for around 1 in 5 people and treatment may need to be repeated.

Some people get very bad flare-ups when they stop treatment. If you do, you may need a faecal transplant (transfer of poo bugs from someone else) to treat the infection.

Repeat infections

A small number of people who receive treatment for C. diff can get repeated C. diff infections. In some cases, a faecal transplant (transfer of poo bugs from someone else) may be needed.

In rare cases, a serious C. diff infection may require surgery to remove a damaged section of the bowel.

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