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C. diff Infections

Also called: Clostridioides difficile infections, Clostridium difficile Infections, Clostridium enterocolitis, Pseudomembranous colitis

What is C. diff?

C. diff is a bacterium that can cause diarrhea [<https://medlineplus.gov/diarrhea.html>] and more serious intestinal conditions such as colitis. You may see it called other names, such as *Clostridioides difficile* (the new name), *Clostridium difficile* (an older name), and *C. difficile*. It causes close to half a million illnesses each year.

What causes C. diff infections?

C. diff bacteria are commonly found in the environment, but people usually only get C. diff infections when they are taking antibiotics [<https://medlineplus.gov/antibiotics.html>]. That's because antibiotics not only wipe out bad germs, but they also kill the good germs that protect your body against infections. The effect of antibiotics can last as long as several months. If you come in contact with C. diff germs during this time, you can get sick. You are more likely to get a C. diff infection if you take antibiotics for more than a week.

C. diff spreads when people touch food, surfaces, or objects that are contaminated with feces (poop) from a person who has C. diff.

Who is more likely to get a C. diff infection?

You are at more likely to get a C. diff infection if you:

- Are taking antibiotics
- Are 65 or older
- Recently stayed in a hospital or nursing home
- Have a weakened immune system
- Have had a previous infection with C. diff or were exposed to it

What are the symptoms of C. diff infections?

The symptoms of C. diff infections include:

- Diarrhea (loose, watery stools) or frequent bowel movements for several days
- Fever [<https://medlineplus.gov/fever.html>]
- Stomach tenderness or pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea [<https://medlineplus.gov/nauseaandvomiting.html>]

Severe diarrhea causes you to lose a lot of fluids. This can put you at risk for dehydration [<https://medlineplus.gov/dehydration.html>].

How are C. diff infections diagnosed?

If you have been taking antibiotics recently and have symptoms of a *C. diff* infection, you should see your health care provider. Your provider will ask about your symptoms and do a lab test of your stool [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/bacteria-culture-test/>] . In some cases, you might also need an imaging test [<https://medlineplus.gov/diagnosticimaging.html>] such as an x-ray [<https://medlineplus.gov/xrays.html>] or CT scan [<https://medlineplus.gov/ctscans.html>] to check for complications.

What are the treatments for *C. diff* infections?

Certain antibiotics can treat *C. diff* infections. If you were already taking a different antibiotic when you got *C. diff*, your provider may ask you to stop taking that one.

If you have a severe case, you may need to stay in the hospital. If you have very severe pain or serious complications, you may need surgery to remove the diseased part of your colon.

About 1 in 6 people who have had a *C. diff* infection will get it again within the following 2 to 8 weeks. This is called recurrent *C. diff*. It could be that your original infection came back or that you have a new infection. Contact your provider if your symptoms come back.

For people who keep getting *C. diff* infections, treatments such as fecal microbiota transplants (FMT) have shown promising results. FMT uses stool (or bacteria from stool) from a healthy donor to try to restore the balance of healthy bacteria in your intestines.

Can *C. diff* infections be prevented?

There are steps you can take to try to prevent getting or spreading *C. diff*:

- Wash your hands with soap and water after you use the bathroom and before you eat.
- If you have diarrhea, clean the bathroom that you used before anyone else uses it. Use bleach mixed with water or another disinfectant to clean the toilet seat, handle, and lid.

Health care providers can also help prevent *C. diff* infections by taking infection control [<https://medlineplus.gov/infectioncontrol.html>] precautions and improving how they prescribe antibiotics.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Start Here

- *C. diff* (*Clostridioides difficile*) [<https://www.cdc.gov/c-diff/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Clostridium difficile (*C. diff.*) Infection [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/clostridium-difficile-c-diff-infection/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/infeccion-por-clostridium-difficile-es/?adfree=true>]

Diagnosis and Tests

- C. Diff Testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/c-diff-testing/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-c-difficile/>]
- Stool Test: C. Difficile Toxin (For Parents) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/test-difficile.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/test-difficile.html>]

Treatments and Therapies

- Fecal microbiota transplant [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007703.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/007703.htm>]
- Probiotics: Usefulness and Safety [<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/probiotics-usefulness-and-safety>]  (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)

Specifics

- Antibiotic-Associated Diarrhea [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/antibiotic-associated-diarrhea/symptoms-causes/syc-20352231?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/antibiotic-associated-diarrhea/symptoms-causes/syc-20352231?p=1>]
- Pseudomembranous Colitis [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pseudomembranous-colitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20351434?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Clostridioides difficile [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Clostridioides+difficile%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Enterocolitis, Pseudomembranous [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Enterocolitis,+Pseudomembranous%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: An Updated View on the Cellular Uptake and Mode-of-Action of Clostridioides... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/38175478>]
- Article: Azithromycin Treatment for Acne Vulgaris: A Case Report on the Risk... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/37983201>]
- Article: Detection of Clostridium difficile among diarrheic children using cultural and polymerase... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/37956379>]
- C. diff Infections -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Clostridioides+difficile%22%5Bmajr%5D+AND+%22Enterocolitis%2C+Pseudomembranous%22%5Bmajr%5D+A ND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+>]

Find an Expert

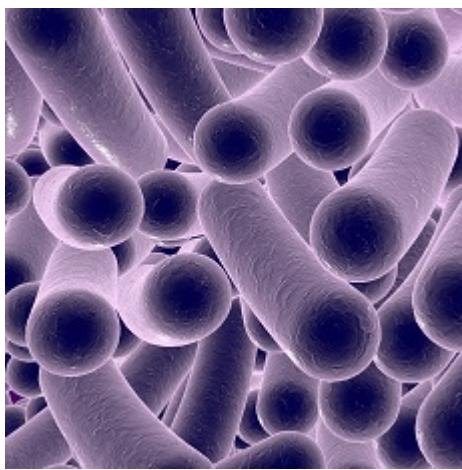
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [<https://www.cdc.gov/>]
Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/>]
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/>] 

Children

- Clostridium difficile [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/abdominal/pages/Clostridium-difficile.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/health-issues/conditions/abdominal/paginas/clostridium-difficile.aspx>]

Patient Handouts

- Fecal microbiota transplant [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007703.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/007703.htm>]
- Pseudomembranous colitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000259.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000259.htm>]
- Stool C difficile toxin [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003590.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003590.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

Fecal microbiota transplant [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007703.htm>]

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