



Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital **NHS**
NHS Trust

A Patient's Guide to Clostridium Difficile



What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile is a bacterium (bug) which causes diarrhoea, sometimes with abdominal pain and vomiting. It often occurs following treatment with antibiotics. Most often it affects elderly people and those with other health problems.

The symptoms range from mild diarrhoea for a few days, which stops on its own, to frequent offensive stools with mucus and sometimes blood.

How do staff find out if I have Clostridium difficile?

If you have had three or more episodes of diarrhoea within 24 hours we will take a stool specimen and send it to the laboratory for testing. The result should be available between 24 – 48 hours later.

Can it be treated?

Yes. Sometimes stopping the antibiotics is sufficient. In more severe cases a specific antibiotic tablet will be given for seven to 10 days. Symptoms usually subside after two to three days.

How do we stop it spreading?

The bacterium is found in large numbers in faeces but it can also live in dust, bed sheets and on surfaces. Your room will be cleaned daily with a chlorine-based cleaning agent. It is advisable that your nightwear and bed linen is changed daily or when soiled.

Hand washing with soap and water is necessary to prevent the spread of infection. Alcohol hand-rub is ineffective, as it will not kill *Clostridium difficile* spores.

Do I need to be in a single room?

Yes, as isolation in conjunction with good infection control practice is the key to preventing cross infection to other patients.

This will give you more privacy, especially when symptoms are at their most distressing. You will have your own commode if an en-suite facility is not available.

Can I have visitors and are they at risk of catching Clostridium difficile?

Visitors may still come and see you. Healthy people are at very little risk of catching Clostridium difficile. It is not a problem to children and pregnant women.

There is no need for visitors to wear gloves and aprons, unless they are giving close personal care, for example, washing you or changing your clothes. However, if people are visiting other patients, they must see the non-infectious patient first.

Hands should be washed thoroughly on leaving the side room.

What about my personal laundry?

If you are suffering from diarrhoea due to Clostridium difficile, you should only use hospital linen and nightwear. However, if you choose to wear your own clothes, they should be taken home daily by relatives and washed separately at temperatures above 60°C.

Can it come back?

Unfortunately yes. Further courses of antibiotics may cause the symptoms to return. Sometimes it will be necessary to give a longer course of treatment to eliminate the problem.

How will I know when the *Clostridium difficile* has gone?

When the diarrhoea stops, the course of antibiotics has been finished and when your normal bowel habit returns, we consider the infection has gone. There is no need to send a further specimen to check for *Clostridium difficile*.

If you have any comments about this leaflet, please contact the Clinical Governance Department on 020 8909 5439/5717.

Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust
Brockley Hill
Stanmore
Middlesex
HA7 4LP

www.rnoh.nhs.uk

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Author: Infection Prevention and Control
Department

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