

10. How will I know when the *C. diff* is no longer infectious?

Once the diarrhoea has stopped for at least 48 hours and your bowel motion is back to normal you are not considered to be infectious.

11. Can *C. diff* diarrhoea come back?

Yes. Some patients may suffer a relapse of diarrhoea. *C. diff* bacteria may remain in your bowel for some time afterwards and the diarrhoea may return requiring further treatment.

Please contact your GP/family doctor if you develop diarrhoea after you are discharged from hospital and let him/her know that you had *C. diff* recently.

If you need antibiotics for another illness please tell your GP/family doctor that you have recently had *C. diff*.

12. What happens if I have to come back to hospital?

If you come back to the hospital or go to a different hospital, it is very important that you inform the A&E Department or the Admissions Office that you have previously had *C. diff* diarrhoea. You must do this before a bed is allocated to you in a ward.

For Visitors and Carers

13. Guidelines for families and carers

The hospital has rules on visiting which you must follow.

If you are visiting a patient with *C. diff* you can help to prevent the spread of infection by following the hospital's visiting rules and using these precautions.

- Do not visit if you have any illness.
- It is preferable that you do not visit more than one person on a hospital visit. However, if you are visiting more than one patient, check with the nurse in charge in advance and visit the person who has *C. diff* last.
- Do not bring children to visit.
- Do not sit on patients' beds.
- Help the patient to minimise clutter around the bed, e.g. by not having too many possessions around as this will assist thorough cleaning of the area.
- Wash your hands with soap under **running** water and dry them, before entering and before leaving the ward.
- Follow any additional advice from ward staff.

People who are worried that they may have a particular risk of getting *C. diff* infection are advised to seek advice on an individual basis from either the doctor or nurse.

All visitors must in any event observe the hospital's policy on visiting.

14. Laundering a patient's clothing

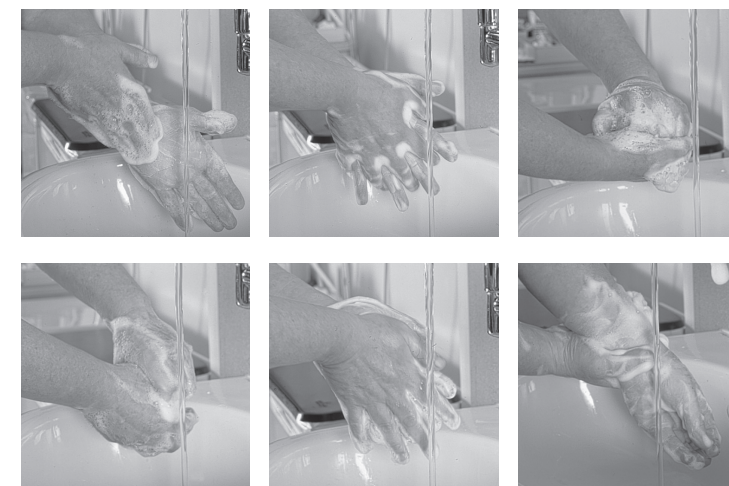
Staff will provide advice on safe handling and processing of home laundry.

15. How to wash your hands properly

Handwashing is strongly recommended before eating meals and after all visits to the toilet.

1. Wet your hands under **running** water
2. Lather with soap
3. Cover all parts of your hands
4. Rinse well under running water
5. Dry thoroughly

It takes around 30 seconds to wash your hands properly.



If you have any questions or concerns about the advice given in this leaflet, please ask a member of staff.



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CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE INFECTION

Information for patients, their families and carers.
What does it mean if someone has *Clostridium difficile*, or "*C. diff*"?
These notes are designed to answer some of your questions about *C. diff* and help you to understand the infection.

Background

1. What is *C. diff*?

C. diff is short for Clostridium difficile. This is a bacterium (germ) which some people carry in their bowel without becoming ill. It is normally kept under control by the “good” bacteria in the bowel. *C. diff* normally doesn’t cause any problems in healthy people. However, when these good bacteria are killed by antibiotics *C. diff* is able to multiply and produce toxins (poisons) which may cause diarrhoea. In addition, *C. diff* produces spores. A spore is a germ with a coat that enables it to survive for a long time in the environment.

2. What are the symptoms of *C. diff*?

- The main symptom is explosive diarrhoea which has a particularly unpleasant smell.
- Other symptoms include stomach cramps, fever, nausea and loss of appetite.
- Most people become only mildly ill and then recover fully.
- The vast majority of patients make a straightforward recovery.
- Symptoms may last from a few days to several weeks.
- Some patients may become seriously ill and develop inflammation of the bowel (colitis). If the colitis is severe it can be life-threatening.

For Patients

3. What should I do if I develop diarrhoea?

If you have diarrhoea, or loose motions, it is very important you tell the nurse so that, if necessary, a sample can be sent to the lab. Not all diarrhoea in hospital is due to *C. diff*.

A sample of diarrhoea is sent to the lab for testing for *C. diff* toxin. The result is usually available within 24 hours.

It is important to wash your hands before any meals.

4. How does *C. diff* spread?

Patients who have *C. diff* associated diarrhoea excrete large numbers of spores. This may contaminate the area around the patient, their bed, toilet areas, or equipment. The spores can survive for a long time in dust, bed clothes, on surfaces and equipment and may be a source of infection for others.

This means anyone who comes into contact with contaminated surfaces can easily spread infection. The spores can then infect other people by entering the body through the mouth.

In most cases the disease develops by being spread from another patient directly or through contaminated hands, equipment or environment.

5. What will happen to me if I have *C. diff* diarrhoea while I’m in hospital?

Patients with *C. diff* are usually moved to a single room to prevent the spread of infection to other patients. You may

be asked to move to another ward if a single room is not available. Sometimes patients are nursed in a bay together with other patients who have the same infection. It is important you stay in that room/bay and do not visit other patients until the diarrhoea has stopped. Your nurse will advise you.

Thorough handwashing and drying is very important as this helps to prevent the germ from spreading. Hospital staff will take special infection control precautions to prevent the spread of infection. It is advisable that nightwear and bed linen are changed daily or when soiled. Your room should be cleaned daily, with a special chlorine-based cleaning product.

6. What treatment will I need?

You will only need treatment if you have symptoms. No treatment is needed if the *C. diff* germs are present harmlessly in your gut and you do not have diarrhoea.

The doctor/staff will assess treatment options, and if certain antibiotics have caused the diarrhoea you may have to stop taking them. Sometimes stopping the antibiotics is enough. If diarrhoea continues then a specific antibiotic may be prescribed to help clear up the *C. diff* infection.

7. How did I get *C. diff*?

Some people, as mentioned before, may be healthy carriers of *C. diff* and the source of their infection will be from *C. diff* living in their own gut. The number of *C. diff* germs can grow if the person is given antibiotics to treat an infection. In other cases environmental spores may be swallowed and subsequent antibiotic treatment leads to disease.

You are at more risk of developing *C. diff* infection if you:

- are taking or have recently finished taking antibiotics;
- are an older person;
- have spent a long time in hospital or in another type of healthcare setting such as a nursing home;
- have weakened immunity, e.g. because you are receiving cancer treatment;
- are being treated by multiple courses of antibiotics;
- have a serious illness, or
- have had bowel surgery.

8. Can I have visitors?

You can have visitors. They will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water before and after visiting you so that they do not pick up the germ or spread it to others. Healthy people are at very little risk of developing *C. diff* diarrhoea.

Your visitors must comply with the hospital’s visiting policy, including rules about visiting more than one patient.

If you are concerned about infecting anyone ask the staff caring for you for advice.

See also section 13, Guidelines for families and carers.

9. How long do I have to stay in hospital?

You should normally wait until the diarrhoea has settled and your doctor is satisfied that you are fit to go home. Your doctor will let you know if you need to continue treatment at home. However, you will not have to stay any longer than necessary and can go home whenever you are medically fit for discharge.