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NHS Foundation Trust

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HOSPITAL | COMMUNITY | HOME

## Clostridium Difficile

Some of your questions answered

Issued by The Infection Control Team

This leaflet provides information about Clostridium difficile, what it is and what can be done to prevent it.

## **What is Clostridium difficile (C.difficile)?**

C.difficile is a spore forming bacterium which can be part of the normal gut flora. It is estimated to be present in the gut of nearly 3% of healthy adults in the general population where it does no harm and causes no symptoms. However, in patients who are in hospital this rate can rise to as much as 40%.

## **Risks – who is at risk of developing these symptoms?**

- Anyone taking antibiotics or stomach acid lowering drugs (an example would be proton pump inhibitors e.g. Lansoprazole)
- People in hospital, especially elderly patients
- People with inflammatory bowel disease e.g. Crohn's, Ulcerative colitis
- People who have had surgery on the stomach and/or bowel
- People who are immunocompromised.

## **How do people get it?**

Everyone's bowel contains millions of bacteria which protect us from bowel infections such as Clostridium difficile. When some people are given antibiotics these bacteria can be disrupted, giving bacteria such as Clostridium difficile the opportunity to multiply and cause diarrhoea.

## **Symptoms and diagnosis of Clostridium difficile infection**

You may experience symptoms of diarrhoea which can be severe and develop suddenly. This may be associated with abdominal pain and fever.

In the majority of patients the illness is mild but can make a small proportion of patients affected very ill.

Diagnosis of C.difficile is most commonly confirmed by testing stool specimens in the laboratory. Occasionally it may be diagnosed by x-ray or looking directly at the bowel (e.g. at colonoscopy).

## **What will happen to me?**

If you are in hospital you will be asked to move to a single room whilst you have diarrhoea to minimise the risk of spread to others. Staff caring for you will use plastic aprons and gloves.

You will have your own toilet facilities to prevent the spread of the bacteria into the environment as C.difficile spores can live in the environment for a long time. Your room will be regularly cleaned throughout the day.

When you have formed stools for two days, you may be able to return to the ward area if appropriate.

**We will encourage you, your visitors, friends and family to wash your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water. Alcohol gel is not effective against the C.difficile spores.**

## **Can I have visitors?**

Yes, you can have visitors. Your relatives and friends should wash their hands with soap and water on entering and leaving the ward. Your visitors are more vulnerable to this infection if they are taking antibiotics themselves.

After you leave hospital, you may still have diarrhoea, so please continue to wash your hands with soap and water after each visit to the toilet. All members of your family should also be aware of the need for good hand washing. Ensure toilet areas are kept clean.

## **Treatment**

Your doctor may decide to stop any antibiotics you are taking or prescribe a different course of antibiotic which is effective against the bacteria.

## **Why do I need dietary advice?**

If you have diarrhoea, this can sometimes make you feel unwell and make you less inclined to eat. You may also be afraid to eat or drink too much in case it makes your diarrhoea worse.

In some cases you will have picked up *Clostridium difficile* because you are already frail or are on/or have had antibiotics for another infection. In which case, your appetite and weight may already be affected.

This leaflet will help you choose appropriate meals, snacks and drinks while you are in hospital to help you stay as well as possible. You may receive a visit if required from the dietician.

## What can I drink?

When your symptoms are at their worst, try to keep drinking to avoid dehydration. Try to have 10 to 15 cups of fluid per day. Choose any drink that you prefer. Suitable choices can include:

- Water
- Fizzy drinks
- Beef drinks
- Decaffeinated coffee
- Squash
- Clear soups
- Tea
- Fruit tea

Sugar or honey can be added to drinks to add calories.

Fresh fruit juices should be diluted with the same volume of water, tonic, lemonade or soda water. This is because they can make diarrhoea worse if drunk when concentrated. However, they are a good source of vitamin C so should still be part of your diet. Milk and milky drinks are a valuable source of nutrition and can be introduced into your diet.

## What can I eat?

When your appetite allows, soft easy to eat foods can be included such as:

- White bread or toast
- Plain biscuits
- Tender meats
- Sorbet
- Milk puddings
- Mashed potato
- White fish
- Jelly
- Yoghurt
- Ice cream

Root vegetables, such as carrots, parsnips, beetroot and swede, and stewed fruit are good choices.

## **What foods and drinks should I avoid?**

Foods that may irritate the gut such as alcohol, spicy food and greasy food are best avoided.

Foods that contain a lot of fibre such as wholegrain cereals, wholemeal bread, fibrous fruits and vegetables and pulses are best avoided.

Glucose drinks are too concentrated and can also have a laxative effect. These should also be diluted with water or lemonade.

However, isotonic sports drinks are suitable as they are the correct strength.

## **Is there anything I can do to minimise the risk of infection while I am in hospital?**

- Wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet
- Wash your hands thoroughly before eating food including snacks
- Do not keep opened/unused foods to eat later
- Discuss this with your visitors and allow them to view this leaflet.

## **Can my family or friends bring food into hospital for me?**

At Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust we do not routinely advise members of the public to bring in foods and snacks from outside. This is to allow us to monitor the foods our patients are consuming.

If this cannot be avoided, this leaflet will provide you and your visitors with information on the foods which should be avoided and possible alternatives. You and your visitors should remember that certain foods can cause a laxative effect.

## **General guidance**

It can sometimes help if your meals are small and regular. Your nutritional intake can be boosted by snacks such as biscuits, a snack box, build-up drinks and soups; or any nutritional supplement

drink recommended by your dietician. These do not need to be stopped if you have diarrhoea.

## **What about pro-biotics?**

You may have heard that pro-biotic drinks, yoghurts and supplements may help to treat your diarrhoea. The evidence for this is not strong enough for the Trust to recommend these products. However, if you are already taking these products it will not harm you to continue taking them.

## **What happens when I go home?**

There are many ways in which you can help to reduce the spread of infection within your own home:

- Clean your hands after using the toilet, urinal or commode with soap and water
- Carers should also practice good hand hygiene using soap and water. This is especially important after contact with infected persons or surfaces within their immediate environment.
- Clothing and bed linen from an infected person should be laundered separately to the rest of the family. Items should be laundered at the highest possible temperature according to manufacturers guidelines using a biological washing powder
- Personal hygiene products such as facecloths, towels and toothbrushes should not be shared
- Surfaces where food is prepared should be thoroughly cleaned using a bleach based product, both before food preparation and after
- Frequently touched areas in bathrooms such as toilet seats, wash basins and toilet flush handles should also be thoroughly cleaned with a bleach based product
- Should floors or surfaces become soiled with faeces, these must be cleaned immediately using a disposable cloth and detergent, then disinfected with a bleach based cleaning product. It is also advisable to re-clean the surface a second time to destroy any residual bacteria. If possible, disposable gloves should be worn to reduce the risk of cross-infection

- If disposable cloths are not available, re-usable cloths must be washed at a very high temperature (60°C) using a biological soap powder. Or prior to washing, soaked in cold water for at least 20 minutes with a bleach based product. Keep windows open when diluting or using bleach to ensure good ventilation
- General household cleanliness is also very important. Surfaces such as telephones, door handles and bedside tables should be cleaned daily with a household bleach based cleaner. Carpets and floors should be vacuumed daily. Vacuum bags and cylinders should be emptied/changed on a more regular basis and hands cleaned with soap and water following this.

## **Contact with Infection Control Team**

Anyone who has been diagnosed with C.diff colonisation or infection will be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns with a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team.

If you are a patient in hospital, the team will visit you on the ward. If you are at home the team will contact you to offer you a home visit.

Along with the information leaflet you will also receive a Clostridium Difficile Infection Card (CDI card). The purpose of this card is to alert any Healthcare Professional who may be caring for you that you have previously been diagnosed with C.diff colonisation or infection. It will help them to make decisions about medication you may need prescribed in the future.

Ongoing support can be offered once discharged or at home, however you may feel this unnecessary. It is estimated 20-30% of people treated for C.diff infection may have a repeat of their symptoms; therefore it is vitally important that should your symptoms reoccur you contact your GP immediately.

## **Contacts**

If you require any further information or need to speak to someone you can contact either the hospital or community infection control teams on 03 44 811 8111.

## **Alternative Formats**

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on **03 44 811 8118**

## **Other sources of information**

### **NHS 111**

### **NHS Choices**

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### **NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)**

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

Freephone: **0800 032 0202**

Text: 01670 511098

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### **Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**

General Enquiries **03 44 811 8111**

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

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