

Clostridium Difficile

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile, known as C. difficile is a bacteria which is present as one of the 'normal' bacteria in the bowel of up to 3% of the healthy adult population. C. difficile can cause illness when certain antibiotics disturb the balance of 'normal' bacteria in the gut – this allows C. difficile to proliferate and produce a toxin.

What are the symptoms?

The effects of C. difficile can vary from a mild diarrhoea, abdominal pain, diarrhoea and systemic upset to more serious conditions including possible perforation of the bowel. Other symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite and nausea.

Who gets C. difficile infection?

Patients who have been treated with broad spectrum antibiotics are at greatest risk. Most of those affected are the elderly and people with poor immune systems.

How does it spread?

It is possible for the infection to spread from person to person because those suffering from C. difficile shed spores in their faeces.

These spores are very hardy forms of the bacteria that can survive for long periods of time in the environment. The spores can be transported on the hands of health care workers who have direct contact with infected patients or with environmental surfaces (floors, bedpans, toilets etc.) contaminated with C. difficile.

What can be done to prevent the spread?

- Staff should wash their hands before and after every patient contact, and wear gloves and aprons when caring for infected patients.
- Patients should wash their hands regularly with soap and water, especially after using the toilet or commode and before eating.
- If possible the affected patient should have their own room and toilet facilities.
- High standards of daily environmental cleaning, particularly in the toilet and bathroom areas is essential.

- Clothes and bed linen must be changed daily or when soiled.

Hand washing with SOAP AND WATER not alcohol hand gel is essential to prevent the spread of the infection as alcohol hand gel is not effective at removing or killing the spores that C. difficile produce.

How can it be treated?

C. difficile can be treated with specific antibiotics. Most patients with C. difficile make a full recovery, however some elderly patients with underlying conditions may have a more prolonged and severe illness.

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to the ward manager or you can contact the Trust Infection Control Nurse, Helen Nicholls on 01322 625700 ext 5782 or email Helen.nicholls@oxleas.nhs.uk.