Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Clostridioides Difficile

This information explains infection *with Clostridioides difficile (C. diff),* including how it's spread and how it's treated.

What is Clostridioides difficile?

Clostridioides difficile, or *C. diff,* is a germ that causes an infection in your colon. The infection gives you diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements) and colitis. Colitis is an inflammation (swelling and redness) of your colon.

How does C. diff spread?

C. diff is spread by direct contact with an infected person's bowel movement (stool). It can also be spread by contact with equipment or surfaces that may have the germ on them. Casual contact, such as touching or hugging, doesn't spread *C. diff*.

Who is at risk for a C. diff infection?

C. diff infections occur more often in people who:

- Are older.
- Have weakened immune systems.
- Have chronic illnesses, such as cancer and diabetes.
- Have been treated with antibiotics in the past.
- Have had abdominal (belly) surgery.
- Have had repeated or long stays in the hospital.
- Have low stomach acid or have taken antacids (medicine to reduce stomach acid).

What are the symptoms of a C. diff infection?

Diarrhea is the main symptom of mild cases of *C. diff* infections. Symptoms of more severe cases include abdominal cramps and diarrhea with blood and mucus.

How is a C. diff infection treated?

C. diff infection is treated with antibiotics. The usual treatment is metronidazole (Flagyl®), which is taken for 7 to 14 days.

What isolation precautions are taken in the hospital if I have a C. diff infection?

Isolation precautions are steps we take to stop infections from spreading from person to person. If you're diagnosed with *C. diff* infection while you're in the hospital:

- You will be placed in a private room.
- A sign will be posted on your door telling all staff to wash their hands. They can use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before going into your room.
- All staff will also need to wash their hands with soap and water after leaving your room.
- All staff will need to wear a yellow gown and gloves while in your room. These are found outside of your room and can be disposed of inside your room.
- If you leave your room for tests, you must wear a yellow gown and gloves, or be covered with a clean sheet.
- If you leave your room to walk around the unit, you must wear a yellow gown and gloves.
- You will not be able to go to the following areas of the hospital:

- Pantry on your unit
- Pediatric recreation areas on M9
- Cafeteria
- Main lobby
- Any other public area of the hospital

You can stop following these precautions after you received treatment and no longer have symptoms.

What precautions should I take at home if I have a C. diff infection?

Be sure to do the following at home:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the bathroom.
- Use a bleach-based disinfectant, such as Clorox® or Lysol®, to wipe any surfaces that may have come in contact with the germ, such as your doorknob.

Where can I get more information about C. diff?

If you have any questions, talk with your healthcare provider. You can also visit this website for more information:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/cdiff/cdiff_infect.html

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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