

# About *C. diff* Infection

## For Patients, Family and Visitors

### What is *C. diff* (*clostridium difficile*)?

*C. diff* are germs (bacteria). These germs can live in the guts of healthy people. Antibiotic medicine can change the balance of germs in the gut, causing *C. diff* infection and loose, watery stools (diarrhea).

You can also get *C. diff* infection during a hospital stay, after surgery, or if you have a weak immune system or IBD (inflammatory bowel disease).

For a video, visit <https://youtu.be/Zb9tJmo6z4M>.

### What are the symptoms?

If you have these symptoms, your doctor will ask for a stool (poop) sample for testing:

- Diarrhea (loose, watery stools)
- Belly pain, tenderness and cramping
- Fever

### How does it spread?

*C. diff* safely leaves your body as part of your stool. However, it can make you ill if:

1. You touch a surface that has *C. diff* germs, *then*
2. You touch food or objects that go in your mouth.

### How can you prevent *C. diff* infections?

- **Wash hands often**, especially in the hospital, after using the bathroom and before you eat.
- Use antibiotics only when you need them. **Don't** ask for them if your doctor says you have a virus.
- If you take antibiotics, follow the directions. Finish **all** the pills, even if you feel better.

- If you have *C. diff* infection, try to use a separate restroom until you are well.
- At home, clean countertops, sinks, faucets, bathroom doorknobs and toilets **often**. Use warm water with soap or cleaning products with bleach. (**Don't** use pure bleach. It's too strong.)
- In the hospital, your care team should wear gloves and gowns. They should clean their hands before touching you and before leaving the room. **If they don't, please remind them.**

### Hand washing

For this illness, soap and water works better than hand sanitizer.

- Wash hands with warm water and plenty of soap. Wash for 15 to 20 seconds.
- Clean under nails, between fingers and up the wrists.
- Rinse hands, letting water run down your fingers.
- Dry hands well. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door.

### How is it treated?

Your doctor may change your antibiotics and give you medicine for diarrhea. **Don't** take other medicine for diarrhea. They will make things worse.

You may get extra fluids through an IV (small tube in the arm or hand).

Sometimes, the infection comes back. If symptoms return, please call your doctor.