

Clostridium difficile

– Patient Information

Background

Clostridium difficile bacteria can be found in the intestine, especially in young children and the elderly. In certain situations the bacteria can produce toxins that cause diarrhea. The bacteria form spores that can survive in the environment around the patient. Usually there are no symptoms and the bacteria are part of the normal intestinal flora.

Treatment with antibiotics, usually when combined with another therapy or disease, is the most common cause of diarrhea triggered by clostridium bacteria. Antibiotics reduce the quantity of “good” bacteria in the intestine and the clostridium bacteria, which usually are not affected by common antibiotics, may then produce toxins that cause inflammation in the intestinal mucous membrane.

Symptoms

Watery, foul-smelling, loose stools, abdominal pain and moderate fever. Severity of symptoms may vary.

Diagnostics

You will need to submit a stool sample

Treatment

Moderate diarrhea may go away without treatment after the course of antibiotics is finished.

Diarrhea results in the loss of large quantities of fluid, so it is important to replace this loss by frequently drinking small quantities of fluids. If treatment is warranted, your doctor will prescribe a special type of antibiotic that is effective against C. difficile.

Transmission

The infection is primarily spread by diarrhea. Bacteria form resistant spores in the stool that can contaminate surfaces that are touched after using the toilet, such as

the toilet seat, flushing lever, faucets, door knobs, etc. Hands that come into contact with these surfaces then spread the bacteria further. To cause illness, the bacteria need to reach the intestine through the mouth.

Careful hand hygiene is very important. Always wash your hands with soap and water before eating and after using the toilet.

C. difficile survives outside the body for a long time and can thereby cause problems in the health care environment. However, the risk that family members will become infected is very small. Family members should be careful to practice good hand hygiene and not use the same towel as you.

Home measures that you can implement:

- Attention to hand hygiene - wash your hands with liquid soap before cooking, before meals and after visiting the toilet.
- Practice good hygiene by showering several times per week and changing to clean underwear daily.
- Use your own towel and you change it frequently.

Measures taken by hospitals/assisted living facilities

You will be isolated/stay in a room by yourself with your own toilet as long you have diarrhea and for a couple of days after it has stopped. During this time, food will be served in your room. Be extra careful about washing your hands with soap and water before eating and after using the toilet. It is important to practice good hygiene by showering and changing to clean underwear daily. Your visitors should be careful to practice good hand hygiene before and after the visit. They will only be permitted to visit your room and not the rest of the ward.

Ring 1177 for health care advice in English/Swedish or visit www.1177.se/Halland/other-languages