

Your experience

Patient and Carer Experience Team - Tell us your views

Your views are important to us. If you need advice or have feedback on a community hospital in Gloucestershire, or on our community health and adult social care services, you can contact one of the advisers from our Patient and Carer Experience Team.

All enquires are completely confidential. You can contact us between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Telephone: 0300 421 8313 (answerphone available outside office hours)

Email: experience@ghc.nhs.uk

Website: www.ghc.nhs.uk/get-in-touch/give-us-views

Write to: Patient and Carer Experience Team,
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1010 Pioneer Avenue, Gloucester
Business Park, Brockworth,
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For general enquiries or if you would like further information, additional copies or would like to receive this leaflet in another language, braille, large print or on audio format, please contact the Trust Communications Team at the above address. You can email us at GHC.Comms@ghc.nhs.uk or call us on **0300 421 7146**.

If you require further help or information, please contact the ward.



Infection Prevention and Control



Clostridium difficile (C. diff) Patient leaflet

What is it?

Clostridium difficile, now called *Clostridioides difficile* (also known as *C. diff*), is a type of bacteria (germ) which around five per cent of the population carry in their gut. Most people carrying *C. diff* do not become ill as it is normally kept under control by the 'good' bacteria in the gut. However, when the good bacteria are reduced, for example by taking antibiotics, *C. diff* can multiply and produce toxins (poisons) which can cause diarrhoea.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms are generally caused by the production of harmful toxins in the large bowel. The main symptom is diarrhoea; however abdominal pain, fever and vomiting might also be experienced. Symptoms range from mild diarrhoea, which may resolve once antibiotic treatment is stopped, to severe diarrhoea and colitis (inflammation of the large bowel), for which medication is required.

How is it diagnosed?

C. diff infection should be considered in anyone over the age of 2 who develops diarrhoea and who is taking an antibiotic, or who has received a course of antibiotics in the past few weeks. Diagnosis can only be confirmed by testing a sample of faeces. Once a diagnosis has been confirmed, repeat specimens need not be taken.

What causes it?

C. diff is generally associated with, and triggered by, the use of certain antibiotics that have been prescribed to treat other conditions.

How long will the symptoms continue?

This varies from person to person. With some people, the symptoms will settle down within a couple of days, yet with others it may take longer.

Is it infectious?

Not infectious but can be transmitted to other vulnerable patients via hands or dirty equipment used by a patient with *C. diff*. To protect yourself and others it is important to bear in mind that the most common way of transferring bacteria is on the hands. This is why it is so important to wash your hands frequently to break the chain of infection. People with diarrhoea may spread the infection to others without knowing it and outbreaks of *C. diff* infection have been known to occur in hospitals. Person-to-person contact is the main risk, although the *C. diff* bacteria can form spores which enable it to survive in the environment for long periods, e.g. on floors, in dust, on surfaces and around toilets.

Can it be prevented?

In healthcare settings (such as hospitals), infected patients should be cared for in a single room with dedicated toilet facilities. Disposable gloves and aprons should be worn by staff when caring for infected patients. Rigorous cleaning with detergent and disinfectant is the most effective means of removing the germs and spores from the environment when someone has symptoms.

When a patient is identified as having *C. diff* the infection control measures described above will minimise the risk of spread to others. The sensible use of antibiotics is the key to the prevention and control of *C. diff*.

The most efficient control measure in preventing person-to-person spread of this infection is the thorough washing of hands with soap and water.

On its own, alcohol hand gel is not effective in decontaminating hands when caring for a patient with *C. diff*.

Can *Clostridium difficile* be treated?

YES - Depending on the symptoms, the antibiotic thought to have caused the problem will be stopped and/or an alternative one prescribed. Specific antibiotics can be used in the treatment of *C. diff*.

What is the risk to health care workers and patients' relatives?

The risk to healthy staff and visitors is minimal. However, gloves and aprons should be worn when in direct contact with a patient. Hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water following contact with vulnerable patients and immunocompromised staff, who are at increased risk.

If you have any concerns regarding this, please speak to a member of staff.

