

## Infection Control department

# Clostridium difficile

## Information for patients and relatives

### 1. What is Clostridium difficile?

*Clostridium difficile* is a bacterium (bug) which causes diarrhoea, sometimes with abdominal pain and vomiting. It often occurs following treatment with antibiotics.

Most often it affects elderly people and those with other health problems.

The symptoms range from mild diarrhoea for a few days, which stops on its own, to frequent offensive stools with mucous and sometimes blood.

### 2. How do staff find out if I have Clostridium difficile?

If you have diarrhoea for more than 24 hours we will take a stool specimen and send it to the laboratory for testing. The result should be available after about 24 hours.

### 3. Can it be treated?

Yes. Sometimes stopping the antibiotics is sufficient. In more severe cases a specific antibiotic tablet will be given for seven to 10 days. Symptoms usually subside after two to three days.

### 4. How do we stop it spreading?

The bacterium is found in large numbers in the stools but it can also live in dust, bed sheets and on surfaces, so your room should be cleaned daily, with a specific chlorine-based cleaning agent. It is advisable that your nightwear and bed linen should be changed daily or when soiled.

**Hand washing (rather than using alcohol gel) is also necessary to prevent the spread of infection. Alcohol handrub is ineffective if the patient is suffering from *Clostridium difficile*.**

### 5. Do I need to be in a single room?

If you are mobile and able to get to the toilet, you may be nursed in the general ward **only** if no side room is available. If you are in the general ward we will need to check every day in case your situation changes.

However, if you are not able to get to the toilet independently and have frequent diarrhoea, then we will nurse you in a single room. This will give you more privacy, especially when symptoms are at their most distressing. You will have your own commode close at hand.

This will also help to prevent the spread of the infection to other patients who may be more vulnerable than yourself.

## **6. Can people still visit me and can they catch *Clostridium difficile*?**

Visitors may still come and see you. Healthy people are at very little risk of catching *Clostridium difficile*. It is not a problem to children and pregnant women.

There is no need for visitors to wear gloves and aprons, unless they are giving close personal care (for example washing you or changing your clothes). However if people are visiting other patients they must see the non-infectious patient first.

Hands should be washed thoroughly on leaving the side room.

## **7. What about my personal laundry?**

If you are suffering from diarrhoea due to *Clostridium difficile*, you should use only hospital linen and nightwear. However, if you choose to wear your own clothes they should be taken home daily, by relatives and washed separately at temperatures above 60°C.

## **8. Can it come back?**

Unfortunately yes. Further courses of antibiotics may cause the symptoms to return. Sometimes it will be necessary to give a longer course of treatment to eliminate the problem.

## **9. How will I know when the *Clostridium difficile* has gone?**

When the diarrhoea stops, the course of antibiotics has been finished and when your normal bowel habit returns, we consider the infection has gone. There is **no need** to send a further specimen to check.

## **10. Who can I speak to if I have further questions?**

Please speak to any of the ward staff who are caring for you. If they are unable to answer your questions, or if you require further information, the Infection Control Nurses will visit you on the ward, or are available via the hospital switchboard.

## Infection Control

Addenbrookes NHS Trust

Hills Road

Cambridge

CB2 0QQ

Tel: 01223 217497

Internet: [www.addenbrookes.org.uk](http://www.addenbrookes.org.uk)

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format:  
01223 216032 or [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

Potete chiedere di ottenere queste informazioni in altre lingue, in stampato grande o in audiocassetta.

## Italian

若你需要本信息的繁體中文、大字體或音訊格式的版本，請要求索取。

## Cantonese

तमने आ माळिती बीछ भाषाओमां, मोटा अक्षरोमां अथवा सांभिणी शकाय ओवा माध्यम  
(ओडीओ इमॅट)मां जेठनी छोय तो कृपा करीने पूछो.

## Gujarati

تکایه پرسیار بگه نه گهر نه وزانیاریهت دهوی به زمانیکی تر , به بیستی گه وره یانیش به شیوهی دهنگ

## Kurdish

آگر آپ کو یہ معلومات دوسری زبانوں میں، بڑے الفاظ کی اشاعت میں یا آڈیو ٹیپ پر درکار ہوں تو براۓ مہربانی اس کیلئے درخواست کریں۔

## Urdu



Addenbrooke's is smoke-free. Please do not smoke anywhere on the site.

For advice on quitting, contact your GP or the NHS smoking helpline free, 0800 169 0 169

## Document history

Authors	Cheryl Trundle
Department	Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ <a href="http://www.addenbrookes.org.uk">www.addenbrookes.org.uk</a>
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