

# ***Clostridium difficile* Infection in Long-Term Care**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is Clostridium difficile infection?***

*Clostridium difficile*, also known as “*C. diff*”, is a germ that can cause diarrhea. Most cases of *C. diff* infection occur in patients taking antibiotics. The most common symptoms of a *C. diff* infection include: watery diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain and tenderness.

### ***Who is most likely to get C. diff infection?***

The elderly and people with certain medical problems have the greatest chance of getting *C. diff*. *C. diff* spores can live outside the human body for a very long time and may be found on things in the environment such as bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, and medical equipment. *C. diff* infection can spread from person to person on contaminated equipment and on the hands of doctors, nurses, other healthcare providers and visitors.

### ***Can friends and family get C. diff when they visit a patient?***

*C. diff* infection usually does not occur in persons who are not taking antibiotics. Visitors are not likely to get *C. diff*. Still, to make it safer for visitors, they should: clean their hands before entering and when leaving a *C. Diff* patient room. Visitors also should ask the nurse if they need to wear protective gowns and gloves when they visit a patient with *C. Diff*.

### ***What are some of the things that health care providers are doing to prevent C. diff infections?***

- Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for every resident. This can prevent *C. diff* and other germs from being passed from one resident to another on their hands.
- Carefully clean resident rooms and medical equipment that have been used for residents with *C. diff*.
- Use Contact Precautions to prevent *C. diff* from spreading to other residents while the resident has diarrhea. Contact Precautions mean:
  - Whenever possible, residents with *C. diff* will have a single room or share a room only with someone else who also has *C. diff*.
  - Healthcare providers will put on gloves and wear a gown over their clothing while taking care of residents with *C. diff*.
  - Visitors may also be asked to wear a gown and gloves.
  - When leaving the room, hospital providers and visitors remove their gown and gloves and clean their hands.
- Only give residents antibiotics when it is necessary.

### ***What can I do to help prevent C. diff infections?***

- Make sure that all doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers clean their hands with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub before and after caring for you.
- If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.
- Be sure to clean your own hands often, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.

Adopted from CDC, SHEA, APIC, AHA, The Joint Commission