

***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