

How can this infection be prevented?

The key to preventing and controlling the spread of this infection is the sensible use of antibiotics and good hand hygiene. If at all possible, only short courses of antibiotics are prescribed which only kill a small range of bacteria. These are preferred to broad-spectrum ones that affect a wide range of bacteria.

This minimises any bacterial changes in the bowel, which is a key factor in developing the condition. When a patient is identified as having *Clostridium difficile* diarrhoea, the infection control measures described will reduce the risk of it spreading to others.

After discharge

It is important to maintain good personal hygiene after discharge in order to minimise the risk of the infection reoccurring. If symptoms of diarrhoea re-occur following your discharge from hospital, please ensure that you inform your GP as soon as possible of recent diagnosis of *Clostridium difficile*.

You will have been given a *Clostridium difficile* alert card, please keep for one year and use as advised on the card.

You can get more information on *Clostridium difficile* at:
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Comments, compliments, concerns or complaints

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is concerned about the quality of care you receive and strives to maintain high standards of health care.

However we do appreciate that there may be an occasion where you, or your family, feel dissatisfied with the standard of service you receive. Please do not hesitate to tell us about your concerns as this helps us to learn from your experience and to improve services for future patients.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

This service aims to advise and support patients, families and carers and help sort out problems quickly on your behalf. This service is available, and based, at The James Cook University Hospital but also covers the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton, our community hospitals and community health services. Please ask a member of staff for further information.

If you require this information in a different format please contact Freephone 0800 0282451

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Clostridium difficile

General information for
patients and visitors

Infection Prevention
and Control

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile is a cause of diarrhoea, which may be acquired in hospital. In most cases it causes a relatively mild illness but occasionally, particularly in the very frail and elderly, it can be serious.

If a patient is taking or has taken antibiotics and gets diarrhoea, they may have a *Clostridium difficile* infection. Patients at an increased risk of the infection are the elderly and those on antibiotics.

What type of illness does it cause?

A small percentage of the population carry the *Clostridium difficile* organism in their gut, with no ill effects. However, when in hospital, almost all patients who develop this type of diarrhoea are taking, or have recently been given, antibiotics. Though diarrhoea is the most common symptom, stomach pains and fever may also occur.

For most people this is a mild but uncomfortable illness and they will make a full recovery. Some elderly patients can become ill with dehydration caused by the diarrhoea and occasionally patients may develop more serious bowel problems. It is rare for *Clostridium difficile* to spread to other parts of the body such as the blood stream.

How is the disease diagnosed?

Diagnosis is confirmed by the laboratory following the testing of a faeces specimen which must be obtained should *Clostridium difficile* be suspected.

How is *Clostridium difficile* treated?

If patients have a mild illness, stopping their antibiotics (if clinically possible) and replacing lost fluids – either by mouth or intravenous drip – usually leads to a rapid improvement in their health.

However it is sometimes necessary to give specific treatment against *Clostridium difficile* and two antibiotics – Vancomycin and Metronidazole – are very effective.

Metronidazole is taken by mouth and often prescribed as the first choice. However if this does not work, Vancomycin, which is also taken by mouth, can be tried. Some patients may need more than one course of antibiotics.

How is the spread of *Clostridium difficile* controlled?

The most effective way to prevent the bacteria from spreading is by hand washing and that includes staff thoroughly washing their hands before and after contact with the patient.

Patients should always be encouraged to wash their hands after toileting.

Alcohol gel should not be used for patients with *Clostridium difficile*.

Because the bacteria forms spores, it can survive for long periods of time in the environment – for example on floors and around toilets. Infected patients will be isolated from non-infected patients in a single room.

Staff will wear disposable gloves and full length gown when caring for infected patients. Rigorous cleaning with warm water and a chlorine based detergent is the most effective means of removing the spores from the environment.

Visitors will be asked to wear disposable gloves and aprons when visiting infected patients. Visitors must also wash their hands with soap and water before leaving the patients room.

Is there a risk to a patients' relative?

Because most patients with this condition have recently received antibiotics, patients' relatives are at little risk of catching the illness.

However if any of these people are receiving antibiotics there could be some risk of infection and they should pay special attention to their hand washing.