

# ***Clostridium difficile***

## Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease  
Control and Prevention

An Office of the  
Department of Health and Human Services

Paul R. LePage, Governor

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

*Clostridium difficile* infection (sometimes called *C. diff*) is caused by *Clostridium difficile* bacteria. Most cases of *C. diff* infection occur in people taking antibiotics.

### **How is it spread?**

*C. diff* produces spores which can live outside the body in the air or on objects for a long time. *C. diff* has been found in patient settings on objects such as bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, and medical equipment. *C. diff* infection can spread from person-to-person via contaminated equipment and a person's hands.

### **What are the symptoms of *C. diff* infection?**

Infection with *C. diff* can cause:

- watery diarrhea
- stomach cramping
- weakness
- dehydration
- fever
- nausea/vomiting.

### **Who is at risk of getting infected?**

People taking antibiotics, especially more than one, or for a long time, are at greatest risk. Elderly persons, hospital patients, those who live in a nursing home, and those with underlying medical conditions are also at high risk. A person can get *C. diff* more than once.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

*C. diff* is diagnosed with a lab test of the stool.

### **How is it treated?**

Antibiotics are used to treat *C. diff* infection. In rare cases when *C. diff* does not respond to antibiotics, fecal biotherapy may be done. This is when "healthy" stool is transplanted inside a *C. diff* patient.

### **How can *C. diff* infection be prevented?**

- Ask healthcare providers to wash their hands with soap and warm water before and after they care for you. Alcohol sanitizer does not destroy *C. diff* spores.
- Patients with *C. diff* will be on contact precautions. This means the patient is placed in a single room or with another patient at low risk. Providers and visitors wear gloves, gowns, mask, and wash their hands.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces with a 1:10 chlorine bleach product.
- Only take antibiotics when necessary.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Contact your healthcare provider or local health center for more information. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or at [www.mainepublichealth.gov](http://www.mainepublichealth.gov). The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> - is another excellent source of health information.