

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT *C. DIFFICILE* INFECTION

In the Clinic
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What is *Clostridium difficile* infection and how is it spread?

- *C. difficile* (often called *C. diff.*) is a bacterium that can cause mild to severe diarrhea and other symptoms.
- The bacteria are typically spread when people touch surfaces or other persons contaminated with trace amounts of stool and then touch their mouth or nose.
- Workers in health care settings can accidentally spread the bacteria directly to patients or contaminate surfaces that patients touch.

What are symptoms of *C. difficile* infection?

- The main symptom is having at least 3 watery bowel movements daily for 2 days or more.
- Other symptoms include fever, nausea, and abdominal pain.
- *C. difficile* infection can lead to colitis, severe intestinal problems, and sepsis. In rare cases, it can be fatal.

Who gets *C. difficile* infection?

- The infection usually occurs in people who are hospitalized or in nursing homes, and a long length of stay increases the risk.
- Taking antibiotics changes the normal balance of bacteria in the gut, allowing *C. difficile* to multiply and produce toxins. The diarrhea usually occurs during or just after taking antibiotics but can occur up to 3 months later.
- Other risk factors include gastrointestinal surgery or a serious underlying illness.
- Elderly people and people who have a weakened immune system, such as those who are receiving chemotherapy or who have HIV, are also at increased risk.



How do you know if it is *C. difficile*?

- When diarrhea and nausea are severe or persistent along with fever or abdominal pain, it suggests *C. difficile* infection.
- When doctors think a person might have *C. difficile*, they will order stool tests that see if it is the cause.

How is it treated?

- If you are taking an antibiotic, your doctor may tell you to stop taking it. Some patients may need no other treatment.
- Patients often require a different antibiotic to treat *C. difficile*.
- In the most severe cases, surgery may be needed to remove the infected part of the intestines.

For More Information

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<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/diarrhea/>
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
information on what causes diarrhea.

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/clostridiumdifficileinfections.html#cat69
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003590.htm
Information from the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE Plus
on *C. difficile* and on what to expect if you need tested for it.