

## **C. difficile: What you need to know**

C. difficile is normally found in the digestive tract. When a person is on antibiotics or has a compromised immune system, the balance of normal bacteria in the digestive tract is altered, allowing for the over-growth of the C. difficile. The C. difficile release a toxin causing infection and illness.

Symptoms of C. difficile include:

- Diarrhea (often with blood and/or mucous)
- Fever
- Nausea
- Dehydration
- Abdominal pain, tenderness, cramping
- Loss of appetite

A lab test can confirm the diagnosis.

In the hospital, contact precautions will be used to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.

C. difficile is spread very easily. It can be spread from the stool (poop) of infected persons, environmental surfaces such as tables or door knobs. Alcohol gels do not kill these bacteria! Vigorous hand washing with soap and water will kill the bacteria. Infected surfaces must be cleaned with bleach.

If you were on an antibiotic prior to diagnosis, they generally will be stopped. Treatment for C. difficile usually involves a course of Flagyl over ten days. After a few days of treatment, the diarrhea usually stops.

Certain populations are more vulnerable to C. difficile infections. They are:

- Elderly patients
- Pediatric patients
- Patients on long-term antibiotics
- Oncology patients