

## **Clostridium Difficile (C.diff)**

### **What is Clostridium Difficile ?**

Clostridium Difficile (C.diff) is an infection that can cause diarrhoea. It does this by replacing some of the normal bacteria that are found in the gut.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms are generally caused by the production of toxins in the large bowel. The main symptom is diarrhoea; however abdominal pain, fever and vomiting might also be experienced.

Symptoms range from mild diarrhoea which may resolve once antibiotic treatment is stopped to severe diarrhoea and colitis.

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

C.diff infection should be considered in anyone who develops diarrhoea and who is taking an antibiotic, or who has received a course of antibiotics in the past few weeks.

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by testing a sample of your faeces. Such tests are not routinely performed on all faeces specimens but are recommended for specimens from people who are at an increased risk of C.diff infection, such as those on antibiotics and elderly patients, usually those in hospital.

Once a diagnosis has been confirmed, repeat specimens need not be taken.

### **What causes it?**

C.diff is nearly always associated with, and triggered by, the use of certain antibiotics that have been prescribed to treat other conditions.

### **How long will the symptoms continue?**

Between seven to ten days is the most common length of time. However, this varies from person to person. With some people, the symptoms will settle down within a couple of days, yet with others it may take longer.

## Is it infectious?

People with diarrhoea may unintentionally spread the infection to others and large outbreaks of C.diff infection have been known to occur in hospitals.

Person to person contact is the main risk although the bacteria forms spores which enable it to survive for long periods in the environment, e.g. on floors, in dust, on surfaces and around toilets

## Can it be prevented?

In healthcare settings, infected patients should be segregated from non-affected patients, preferably in a single room with dedicated toilet facilities.

Disposable gloves and aprons should be worn by staff when caring for infected patients. Rigorous cleaning with warm water and detergent is probably the most effective means of removing spores from the contaminated environment.

The sensible use of antibiotics is the key to the prevention and control of C.diff.

Finally when a patient is identified as having C.diff diarrhoea the infection control measures described above will minimise the risk of spread to others.

The most efficient control measure in preventing person to person spread of this infection is the thorough washing of hands with soap and water.

## Can Clostridium difficile be treated?

Yes - depending on the symptoms, the antibiotic thought to have caused the problem will be stopped and/or an alternative one prescribed.

Two antibiotics are known to be effective in the treatment of C.diff; metronidazole or vancomycin.

## What is the risk to health care workers and patient relatives?

As most people with this condition have recently received antibiotics, hospital staff and patient's relatives are at little risk of catching the illness themselves. After visiting someone in hospital you should always wash your hands to avoid passing any potential infection on to others.

If you require further help or information please contact the Trust's Infection Control Team on 08454 226166.