

## **Clostridioides difficile (C diff) – information for patients who have been prescribed antibiotics**

You have been given this leaflet because you have been prescribed antibiotics to treat an infection.

Your infection could make you feel very unwell, and antibiotics are the best treatment. Taking antibiotics can cause side effects, and one of the most common side effects is diarrhoea.

Antibiotic-associated diarrhoea (AAD) is generally mild and needs no further treatment. Sometimes, you can get a more serious type of diarrhoea, caused by the germ *Clostridioides difficile*, commonly known as C. diff.

The purpose of this leaflet is to tell you about C. diff infection, which is associated with the use of antibiotics.

The most common signs<sup>1</sup> of C. diff are:

- watery diarrhoea, which can be bloody;
- painful tummy cramps;
- feeling sick;
- signs of dehydration, such as a dry mouth, headaches and peeing less often than normal;
- a high temperature (fever) of above 38C (100.4F); and
- loss of appetite and weight loss.

C. diff can make people very unwell.

**If you have taken antibiotics, you may get C. diff days, weeks or even months after taking them.**

**Please get medical attention promptly if you have signs of a C. diff infection, so that you can be tested and treated as quickly as possible.**

If you have had C. diff before, you **must** tell your healthcare professional, as this could affect your treatment.

Antibiotics can also cause other side effects, as well as C. diff. Please read the information leaflet provided with your antibiotics.

**It is very important to contact a healthcare professional if you develop any side effects from your antibiotics.**

**Please keep taking your antibiotics unless told to stop by a healthcare professional. Stopping prescribed antibiotics without medical advice could make your infection worse.**

## **Further information**

### **What is Clostridioides difficile?**

Clostridioides difficile, commonly known as C. diff, is a germ that is found in the gut of a small number of healthy people.

It is usually harmless but can multiply and cause an infection if other 'good' germs in the gut are harmed by medical treatments, such as antibiotics or chemotherapy. These good germs can help protect against C. diff. The use of antibiotics is the most common cause of a C. diff. infection.

### **How do people get a C. diff infection?**

C. diff can survive outside the body on different surfaces for a long time. It can be found in many places, both inside and outside our homes and hospitals. We can swallow C. diff. germs without realising it after touching surfaces that have C. diff on them. Usually this doesn't make you sick, but sometimes it can.

The most common way germs like C. diff are spread is by people's hands. Washing your hands is the single most important thing you can do to help to reduce the spread of infections. Washing your hands properly can help protect you, your family, and others.

You should make regular hand washing, with soap and water, part of your daily routine, especially before eating or handling food, after using the toilet, when your hands become dirty, and when entering or leaving a hospital.

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

C. diff can damage the lining of the gut wall, causing symptoms including diarrhoea, loss of appetite, feeling sick, tummy pain and fever (high temperature). Sometimes C. diff can cause more serious complications which need to be treated in hospital.

### **You are more likely to get a C. diff infection if you:**

- are taking, or have recently taken, antibiotics;
- are in hospital or a care home, particularly if you have been there a long time;
- are over 65;
- are being treated for cancer;
- are taking medication to reduce the acid in your stomach;
- have an inflammatory gut condition;
- have had stomach or gut surgery; or
- have an illness or are taking medicines that lower your immunity (the way your body fights infections).

### **You can get a C. diff infection without any of these risk factors.**

People can come into contact with C. diff germs and not get sick, but still spread them to others.

### **How does C. diff spread?**

When someone has C. diff, these germs are found in their poo. If their poo is very runny (diarrhoea), it is more likely to spread to other people. Germs can survive on skin (for example, your hands), fabrics, toilets, commodes, bed frames and other surfaces.

Without thorough cleaning, the germs can survive for a very long time, spread, and infect other people.

If you have diarrhoea, you, and anyone you come into direct contact with or share space with while you are poorly, must always wash their hands with soap and water and dry them thoroughly. Alcohol hand gel is **not** effective against C. diff.

---

<sup>i</sup> [Clostridium difficile | NHS inform](#)