



Clostridium difficile (C-diff)

Patient and Family Education

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (pronounced see-diff-uh-heel) is a type of bacteria or germ that normally lives in the intestine. The intestine is the lower part of the gastrointestinal or GI tract.

- When some people take antibiotics or have an infection, the C-diff germ may become active and produce a toxin. The release of this toxin by C-diff can cause diarrhea and other symptoms of stomach upset.
- Some germs like C-diff can form “spores” so that they can live longer and stronger. Spores cannot be killed by usual heat, drying and chemical methods.
- The best way to prevent C-diff from spreading is to wash your hands with soap and water often.

What causes C-diff diarrhea?

C-diff diarrhea occurs when the normal, “good” germs in the intestine are killed by an antibiotic. An antibiotic is medicine used to prevent or treat infections. It doesn’t matter where the infection is – either in the intestines or elsewhere in the body. This may result in C-diff overgrowing and becoming active

What are the possible symptoms and when can they occur?

Symptoms of C-diff infections may include:

- No symptoms at all, or watery stools (diarrhea) for just a day or two
- Watery stools (diarrhea) very often or for a long time
- Cramps, blood or mucus in the stool
- Fever (temperature over 100.3°F),

Symptoms can begin while taking antibiotics during an infection, or weeks after the antibiotics have finished or the infection has cleared.

What medical tests can check for C-diff?

Your child’s doctor may order any of these tests for your child:

- A stool sample for C-diff toxin. This test involves collecting a small sample of stool to check for the toxin.
- In some cases, a doctor may check the inside of your child’s intestines using a flexible tube called a colonoscope. This test is done while your child is asleep.

How can I help prevent the spread of C-diff in the hospital and at home?

- Wash your hands with soap and water after using the restroom, after handling soiled clothes, after cleaning and before eating.
- Clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas with a bleach solution. Use 1 part bleach and 9 parts water. Scrub well and allow the surface to air dry. You may want to wear gloves when cleaning.
- Rinse clothing or fabric soiled with stool (bowel movement) in hot water. Use a detergent containing bleach if possible.
- Wash dishes and eating utensils in hot, soapy water.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child’s doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child. A Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta pediatric advice nurse is available 24 hours a day at 404-250-KIDS.

Clostridium difficile, continued

What is the treatment for C-diff infection?

Your doctor will talk with you about specific care for your child. Some general guidelines may include:

- Your doctor may advise you to stop giving your child certain antibiotics.
- A different antibiotic called metronidazole (Flagyl[®]) or vancomycin (Vancocin[®]) may be started.
- Drink lots of fluids to replace water lost with diarrhea.
- Eat a liquid or soft diet until the diarrhea improves.

What else can I do to help my child?

Talk with your child's doctor about the kinds of food your child should eat while he is still having symptoms. In general, avoid foods that cause gas for your child while he has stomach pain.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor **right away** if your child has any of the following:

- If diarrhea continues or recurs
- Blood in the stool.
- Severe cramps
- Fever of 102°F or change in behavior (tiredness or weakness)
- Vomiting
- Signs of dehydration (drying out):
 - No urine in six to eight hours in an infant younger than 1 year old
 - No urine in more than eight hours in a child older than 1 year old
 - No tears when crying
 - Sunken eyes
 - Dry lips and mouth

Also call if you have any questions or concerns

For more information on C-diff, go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/id_CdiffFAQ_general.

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