



# Clostridium Difficile Diarrhoea

## Information for patients and visitors

### What is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*)?

*C. difficile* are bacteria that for some of us can be part of the normal bacteria in the gut. *C. difficile* diarrhoea can occur when antibiotics are given to treat another infection. Antibiotics reduce the number of both good and bad bacteria and when good bacteria are destroyed, *C. difficile*, normally kept under control by the good bacteria, may flourish.

The risk is reduced with simple hygiene procedures, and the effect for a patient can be lessened by quick positive action. Staff, patients and visitors alike can help.

You can help us to control this infection by washing your hands regularly.

### Is it serious?

Most people will recover from *C. difficile* diarrhoea quite quickly, but symptoms may vary in severity. Older patients or, more rarely, the very young, who are having antibiotic treatment, are at greatest risk.

There are different strains of *C. difficile*, all of which can be treated with antibiotics. In some cases, the symptoms of the infection can be more severe and last for a longer period of time. The more virulent strains of *C. difficile* can be life threatening; patients may die due to complications associated with the disease.

### Can it be treated?

**Yes.** The antibiotics being taken when the symptoms started will be stopped when possible and specific antibiotics to treat *C.*

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*difficile* will be given. Patients are offered probiotic drinks (which help to restore the balance of good bacteria) in their diet as part of their treatment.

### How does it happen?

Approximately 3% of the population have these bacteria present in their bowel. Most of the time, this is harmless. However, when a patient receives a course of antibiotics these bacteria can flourish, resulting in mild to severe diarrhoea. Another way of developing *C. difficile* is from other people or your surroundings. When the bacteria are not in the right environment they can change and survive by becoming 'spores' (like hard seeds, but very tiny) which can survive on surfaces outside of the body. Just like seeds, when they reach the right environment again, they will start to grow.

### How will the doctors know I have *C. difficile*?

A sample of your stool (bowel motion) will be sent to the laboratory and *C.difficile* will be identified there.

### Do I need to be treated in hospital for *C. difficile*?

**No.** Many patients in community settings will also have this infection. You can go home if you are well enough and your diarrhoea has subsided; you do not have to wait until you are completely clear of *C. difficile*. If you feel you would like to go home whilst you still have diarrhoea, you will be assessed to see if you are well enough. There is also a leaflet available called 'Going Home with Clostridium difficile' which may answer some of your questions. If you are going to a nursing or residential home environment, then it is advised to wait until your symptoms have stopped and have remained so for at least 48 hours.

### What action will staff take?

All members of staff having direct contact with you and your environment will wear disposable aprons and gloves. These will be changed between patients. This acts as a protective barrier

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to their uniform and clothing, and lowers the risk of *C. difficile* being passed from patient to patient. Staff will wash their hands with soap and water following removal of the protective clothing.

### Will I be isolated?

**Yes**, you will be nursed in a side room on the ward with barrier nursing precautions in place. This minimises the risk of transmission of infection to others.

### What can I do?

**Hygiene is the most important factor.** Wash your hands after using the toilet and before meals. Try to eat and drink as normally as possible. Probiotic drinks have been found to help restore the balance of good bacteria. If you are incontinent with this infection you should wear hospital nightwear to avoid contaminating your own clothing. If necessary your clothing can be laundered at home, although it is advisable to launder this separately on the hottest wash that the fabric will tolerate.

### Can I still receive visitors if I have *C. difficile*?

**Yes.** Your visitor must always clean their hands with alcohol gel before coming in to the ward (found on the wall at the entrance to every ward). Although the alcohol based gel does not work on *C. difficile* it will help reduce the risk of other organisms which visitors may bring into the ward.

They should report to the nurse in charge of the ward for advice. They will need to wear a plastic apron and disposable gloves which will be at the entrance to the room or bay you are in. Before leaving, these should be removed in the following order, apron then gloves, and placed in the bin with the orange bag within your bay, room, or area. They must then wash their hands with soap and water.

Only two visitors per patient are allowed at a time. It is advised that young children do not visit the ward. Anyone who is not feeling well or is taking tablets that suppress the immune

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system (for arthritis or asthma, for example) should not visit either.

Visitors may kiss you and hold your hand, but thorough hand washing is always recommended after contact. Visitors should sit in a chair rather than on your bed.

Finally, your visitors should not visit any other patients in the hospital on the same visit.

**For any further information and advice please speak to the ward manager or the Infection Control Team.**

**Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust - Infection Control Team:**

Maidstone Hospital

☎ 01622 224037

Tunbridge Wells Hospital

☎ 01892 635679

**MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.**

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

**Telephone:** ☎ 01622 224960 or ☎ 01892 632953

**Email:** [mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net](mailto:mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net)

**or visit their office** at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: [www.mtw.nhs.uk](http://www.mtw.nhs.uk) or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

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