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PATIENT INFORMATION – NURSING CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

What is *Clostridium Difficile* (C DIFF)?

C diff is one of the many germs (bacteria) that can be found in stool (a bowel movement).

What is C Diff Disease?

C diff disease occurs when antibiotics kill your good bowel bacteria and allow the C diff to grow. When C diff grows, it produces substances (toxins). These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. C diff disease is usually mild but sometimes can be severe. In severe cases, surgery may be needed and in extreme cases C diff may cause death. C diff is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospital.

The main symptoms of C diff disease are:

- Watery diarrhea
- Fever
- Abdominal pain or tenderness

Who Gets C Diff?

C diff disease usually occurs during or after the use of antibiotics. Old age, presence of other serious illnesses and poor overall health may increase the risk of severe disease.

How Will Your Doctor Know That You Have C Diff?

If you have symptoms of C diff, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if C diff toxins are present.

How is C Diff Treated?

Treatment depends on how sick you are with the disease. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe disease, an antibiotic is given.

How Does C Diff Spread?

When a person has C diff disease the germs in the stool can soil surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans, or commode chairs. When touching these items our hands can become soiled. If we then touch our mouth we can swallow the germ. Our soiled hands also can spread the germ to other surfaces.

How to Prevent Spread in the Hospital?

If you have C diff diarrhea you will be moved to a private room until you are free from diarrhea for at least 2 days. Your activities outside the room will be restricted. Everyone **MUST** clean their hands when leaving your room.

Always wash your hands after using the bathroom. Cleaning hands is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of this germ. As well, a thorough cleaning of your room and equipment will be done to remove any germs.

What Should I Do at Home?

Healthy people like your family and friends who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting C diff disease.

Hand care

Wash you hands for 15 seconds:

- After using the toilet
- After touching dirty surfaces
- Before eating
- Before preparing meals.

Cleaning the house

Use either a household cleaner diluted according to the instructions or diluted household bleach:

- Wet the surface well and clean using good friction
- Allow the surface to air dry
- Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with stool such as the toilet and sink. If you see stool remove first and then clean as described above.

Cleaning clothes/other fabric

Wash clothes/fabric separately if they are heavily soiled with stool:

- rinse stool off,
- clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- Dry items in the dryer if possible.

Cleaning Dishes:

- Regular cleaning, you can use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water.

It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should not use any drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea (e.g. Imodium). **If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor.** For more information on diarrhea, you can read the patient guide: *Antibiotic-Associated Diarrhea*.

If you want to know more about clostridium difficile disease:

Health Canada: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/c-difficile/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/id_CdiffFAQ_general.html

Source: *Best Practices Document for the Management of Clostridium difficile in Health Care Settings*, PIDAC – June 2007