

Clostridium difficile

Infection control
information

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide information to you and your family about *Clostridium difficile*.

The word 'bacteria' has been used in this leaflet to describe commonly used terms, such as 'bugs' or 'germs'.

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile is a type of bacteria (bug) which causes diarrhoea, sometimes with abdominal pain and vomiting. The bacteria often occurs in the healthy gut and usually does no harm, until certain types of antibiotics kill other bacteria and encourage *Clostridium difficile* to grow and cause diarrhoea.

Most often it affects elderly people and those who already have other health problems and require antibiotics on a regular basis.

The symptoms can range from mild diarrhoea for a few days which stops on its own, to frequent offensive stools with mucus and sometimes blood.

How is *Clostridium difficile* diagnosed?

If you have diarrhoea that is suspected as being infectious, i.e. there is no other obvious cause; the nursing staff will ask you to provide a stool specimen which will be sent to the laboratory for testing. The result should be available after about 24 - 48 hours.

Can it be treated?

Yes. Sometimes stopping the antibiotics is sufficient. In more severe cases a different and specific antibiotic will be given for seven to ten days.

Infection prevention and control precautions

We will nurse you in a single room, known as 'barrier or isolation nursing'. (A separate leaflet is available for you to explain about being in a single room). The single room will give you more privacy and will help to prevent spread of the bacteria within the ward area.

A member of the Infection Prevention and Control team will visit you within 24 hours of the result becoming available (within normal working hours, Mon- Fri) to explain your result, the treatment and answer any questions you or your family may have.

The bacteria are found in large numbers in the stools, so in order to prevent spread to other patients you will be given a designated toilet or commode to use.

Clostridium difficile can survive in dust, bed sheets and on surfaces, so your room should be cleaned daily by the ward domestic.

It is advisable to change your nightwear and towels daily.

Please ask a member of ward staff for clean towels.

Clostridium difficile can be spread on hands. Hand washing is very important to prevent spread of infection:

- You are advised to wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before meals.
- Your visitors are advised to wash their hands with soap and water before entering and leaving your room.
- **All staff** are required to wash their hands before entering and leaving your room.

It is probable you may not be able to see staff cleaning their hands before entering your room, but 'It is ok to ask' staff if they have cleaned their hands.

Your personal laundry should be put separately through the washing machine cycle at home. Hands should be washed after handling laundry.

How will I know when the *Clostridium difficile* has gone?

The Infection Prevention and Control team will review you on a regular basis to monitor your progress. When the diarrhoea has stopped and your normal bowel habit has returned for a period of 72 hours, we consider the infection has gone. There is no need to send a further specimen to check.

Can it come back?

Unfortunately yes. Further courses of certain types of antibiotics may cause the symptoms to return. Sometimes it will be necessary to give a longer course of treatment to eliminate the problem.

What about my family and other visitors?

It is usually quite safe for you to receive visitors, as *Clostridium difficile* does not harm healthy people; however if you have a visitor who has a long term health problem, then please contact the Infection Prevention and Control team for advice prior to their visit.

- Visitors are advised to wash their hands with soap and water before entering and before leaving your room.
- It is not necessary for your visitors to routinely wear gloves or aprons. Staff will advise if required.

What do I need to do about any future admissions to hospital?

It is important that you tell the admitting hospital that you have had *Clostridium difficile* in the past, as this will help the medical staff if they need to prescribe antibiotics.

We hope you can be reassured by the information contained in this leaflet and understand that the measures being taken are part of our continued commitment to the prevention and control of infection within Papworth Hospital.

Please do not hesitate to ask a member of the ward staff, in the first instance, if you have any further questions or ask to contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team.

Further information

Please do not hesitate to ask a member of the ward staff, in the first instance, if you have any further questions or ask to contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team as listed below.

Clinical Nurse Specialist,
Ext 4685
Bleep 131

Infection Control Nurse
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