



CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

July 2, 2014

Clostridium Difficile, sometimes just called *C. difficile* or “*C. diff*,” is a bacterium in the intestine that can cause inflammation leading to **diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps**, and, rarely, a perforation of the bowel causing a medical emergency. People living in group settings like individuals with Intellectual Disabilities can be at higher risk for recurrent infections; and can sometimes require hospitalization.

Contracting *C. Diff*: Initially an individual who is on medicine such as antibiotics which works to kill bad bacteria, also sometimes kills good bacteria. Other medicines like antacids can leave the guts at risk too. When this happens there can be an over growth in bad bacteria or “toxins” and these toxins cause inflammation resulting in **diarrhea, fever, and cramping**. The diarrhea is often stinky and frequent. Besides the new infection in the bowel, the individual is at extreme risk for dehydration and electrolyte imbalances. Being seen by a medical provider is extremely important before treating symptoms.

Risk Factors for *C. Difficile*:

- Receiving antibiotics
- Receiving chemotherapy
- Diseases of the colon
- A weakened immune system
- Age 65 or over
- Surgery of the bowel
- Previous *C. diff* infection

Prevention and treatment:

Hand washing. The spread of *C. diff* is best prevented by hand washing. Hand washing with soap and water for 30 seconds is best. If you don't want to count to 30 – sing the Happy Birthday song. It is critical to wash hands before and after touching someone at risk or diagnosed with C-Diff, even if you had been wearing gloves.

Probiotics or yogurt. Available in most drug and health food stores without a prescription, probiotics provide “good” bacteria to help your gut maintain a ratio of good bacteria while receiving medicines that might put someone at risk for C-Diff.

Fluids. Drinking plenty of water and other fluids or getting intravenous fluids can help guard against dehydration from diarrhea. Many people with G-tubes need increased volumes of water provided for them. **Contact the medical provider for guidance.** If you think an individual with an intellectual disability may have a *C. diff* infection, speak to their doctor before using an anti-diarrhea medicine. **Stopping the diarrhea could actually make the *C. diff* infection worse.**

Treatment. Doctors typically prescribe a 10-day course of one of the following oral antibiotics: metronidazole (Flagyl), Dificid (fidaxomicin), or vancomycin (Vancocin). Flagyl is usually tried first, Vancomycin second. A second round of antibiotics is needed in about 25% of cases.

Source: https://www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/cdiff/cdiff_infect.html
Updated November 2016