

CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

Clostridium Difficile, sometimes just called *C. difficile* or “*C. diff*,” is a bacteria in the intestine that can cause inflammation leading to diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, and, rarely, a perforation of the bowel causing a medical emergency. Unfortunately, individuals with Intellectual Disabilities who may have recurrent infections, live in congregate settings, or who must be hospitalized are at risk for this condition.

Contracting C. Diff: While it may be passed from person to person, it is most commonly associated with the use of antibiotics. Broad spectrum antibiotics, taking multiple antibiotics at the same time, or taking antibiotics for long periods of time may increase the risk of developing *C. diff*. The antibiotics kill some of the “good” bacteria in the bowel and allow the *C. diff* to grow and produce toxins, which harm the bowel wall. People who take medications to reduce stomach acid such as Zantac, Prilosec, or Nexium may be at higher risk as well.

Risk Factors For C. Difficile: Although *C. diff* occasionally causes problems in healthy people, it is most likely to affect patients in hospitals or long-term care facilities. Most have conditions that require long-term treatment with antibiotics, which kill off other intestinal bacteria that keep *C. diff* in check. Other risk factors include:

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

Prevention and treatment:

Hand washing. The spread of *C. diff* is best prevented by hand washing, especially after using the bathroom but also before and after visiting hospitals, nursing homes, or other places where the resident may be weak or ill. ***It is critical that care providers to wash their hands frequently to prevent the spread of C. diff.***

Probiotics or yogurt. Available in most drug and health food stores without a prescription, probiotics are “good” bacteria that colonize in the gut and may help keep *C. diff* infection from occurring or recurring if taken along with prescribed medicines.

Fluids. Drinking plenty of water and other fluids or getting intravenous fluids can help guard against dehydration from diarrhea.

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), Difucid (fidaxomicin), or vancomycin (Vancocin). Flagyl is usually tried first, Vancomycin second. A second round of antibiotics is needed in about 25% of cases.