



If you need your information in another language or medium (audio, large print, etc) please contact Customer Care on 0800 374 208 or send an email to: [customercare@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:customercare@salisbury.nhs.uk)

You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

Please complete The Friends & Family Test to tell us about your experience at: [www.salisbury.nhs.uk/FriendsFamily](http://www.salisbury.nhs.uk/FriendsFamily) or download our App from the Apple App store or Google Play Store.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: [patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk) if you would like a reference list.

Name: Allison Hopkins  
Role: Infection Control Team  
Date written: May 2006  
Review date: January 2021  
Version: 2.0  
Code: PI0371

## ***Clostridium difficile*** (1 of 3)

This leaflet is intended for patients in hospital and their families, to give them a greater understanding of Clostridium difficile (also called C. difficile and C. diff).

### **What is Clostridium difficile?**

It is a bacteria that normally lives in the intestine (gut). Up to 5% of the population are thought to carry this without any problems. It is usually kept in check by other bacteria which are normally present in the intestines.

### **Different strains**

There are many different strains (types) of Clostridium difficile. Some strains produce more toxins than other types and can be associated with more severe disease.

### **How does Clostridium difficile spread?**

Clostridium difficile is able to produce a type of cell known as a spore. These are highly resistant. Spores are excreted in the faeces when a person has diarrhoea, especially if the diarrhoea is severe, or the patient is incontinent. Spores can survive for long periods in the environment and can be transferred to other patients via contaminated hands or equipment.

### **What problems does Clostridium difficile cause?**

Some strains of Clostridium difficile produce toxins (poisons); these cause diarrhoea. They generally do this when the balance of the normal gut bacteria has been disturbed; which can happen when antibiotics are given for other infections. This then enables the Clostridium difficile bacteria to multiply and produce more toxins that damage the cells in the intestines, causing diarrhoea.

This can range from mild diarrhoea to a very severe illness that causes ulceration and bleeding of the intestines (colitis).

Other symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain or tenderness.

**Infection Prevention & Control Team**  
**01722 336262 ext 4089**

## How is Clostridium difficile diagnosed?

It is difficult to diagnose Clostridium difficile from symptoms alone so a sample of diarrhoea is sent to the microbiology laboratory in the hospital. The laboratory looks for the toxins produced by some strains of the Clostridium difficile bacteria.

## How can it be treated?

If it is possible, then the antibiotics that may have contributed to the disease will be stopped. Sometimes other antibiotics which are effective against the Clostridium difficile bacteria will be given instead.

## What happens if someone is diagnosed as having Clostridium difficile?

Whenever possible, a patient diagnosed with Clostridium difficile should be isolated in a side room. Placing patients with Clostridium difficile into a single room can help to prevent the spread of this bacteria. However, not all patients can be isolated this way, it may depend on the condition of the patient.

Personal hygiene must be very strict for patients, visitors and staff. All patients must wash their hands with soap and water after going to the toilet and before eating.

## Can a patient with Clostridium difficile have visitors?

Clostridium difficile does not normally present a risk of infection to the general public. But it is important that all visitors wash their hands with soap and water after visiting a patient with Clostridium difficile.

## What can be done to reduce the risk of Clostridium difficile spreading?

There are 3 important aspects to controlling Clostridium difficile diarrhoea:

- careful use of antibiotics.
- isolation of affected patients and implementation of stringent infection control precautions, including hand washing with soap and water, and the wearing of gloves and aprons when dealing with faeces.
- cleaning of the patients' environment and the use of chlorine-based disinfectant to reduce the risk of spread.

## **Additional information**

Your room will be cleaned twice daily by the housekeeping staff who will wear the same protective clothing as other staff.

All staff will remove their protective clothing and wash their hands before leaving the room.

Staff not in direct contact with you may not be wearing the protective clothing. This includes delivering and removing food and drink from your room.

## **What can I do to help?**

Make sure that any doctor prescribing antibiotics for you is aware that you have a history of Clostridium difficile. This will help them to select the appropriate antibiotic treatments.

We hope you find this information helpful. If there is any additional information you would like, the Infection Prevention and Control Team will be happy to help you.