



What is *Clostridium difficile*?

C. difficile are bacteria that live in the intestinal tract of 5% of healthy adults and 50% of healthy infants. Taking antibiotics kills the many other bacteria types living in the healthy intestine, but *C. difficile* often survives, reproduces in huge numbers, and begins secreting a toxin that attacks the lining of the intestine. *C. difficile* infection is often called antibiotic-associated diarrhea.

What are the symptoms of *C. difficile*-associated disease?

- Abdominal pain, tenderness, and cramping
- Diarrhea, sometimes severe, with blood, mucous, or pus
- Fever

How is *C. difficile*-associated disease diagnosed?

C. difficile diarrhea is confirmed by the presence of a toxin in a stool specimen. A stool specimen is sent to the laboratory for a *C. difficile* titer.

How can *C. difficile*-associated disease be spread?

C. difficile is very infectious. It can be spread by people who have the illness or can be present on environmental surfaces. Usually infection occurs by

- Your hands pick up the organism from the environment
- The organism enters the mouth from the hands during oral contact (e.g. eating)
- If antibiotics are given, then the *C. difficile* has the opportunity to “take over,” causing symptoms

How can *C. difficile*-associated disease be prevented?

- Strict adherence to hand washing techniques – use Soap and Water
- Proper handling and careful disposal of contaminated wastes
- Environmental surfaces should be cleaned with Bleach wipes.
- Limiting the use of antibiotics will lower the risk of developing *C. difficile* diarrhea.
- Special Contact Precautions are used – requiring gowns and gloves for everyone (including visitors) entering the room

Help us protect all of our patients. Follow the nurse’s directions to prevent spread of infection. Wash your hands before eating and after using the bathroom, bedpan or commode.