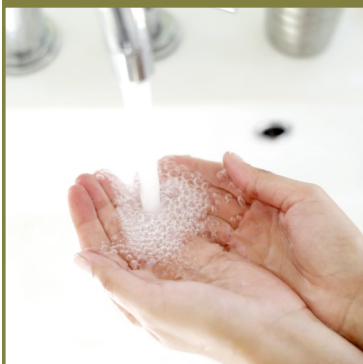


Demystifying C.difficile

*Always wash  
your hands  
well with soap  
and water,  
particularly  
after going to  
the toilet and  
before eating  
food.*



## What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (C.difficile or C.diff) is a type of bacteria found in the stomach and in the environment. C.difficile is normally kept under control by 'good' bacteria in the gut. However, anything that disrupts or destroys these 'good' bacteria can allow the C.difficile to multiply and cause illness. Recent treatment with antibiotics is the most common cause of C.difficile illness.

## What are the symptoms of C.difficile?

Many people carry C.difficile without having any symptoms. Those with C.difficile illness may experience abdominal pain and tenderness, fever, loss of appetite and nausea. Diarrhea is a very common symptom and can vary in severity. Severe inflammation of the bowel is possible, but this is rare. For most people symptoms will begin to settle within a few days, for others it may be longer.

## Who is most at risk of developing C.difficile illness?

People most at risk of C.difficile illness are:

- The elderly (over 65 age group)
- Those who are, or have recently been taking antibiotics
- Those with reduced immunity
- Those who have gastro-intestinal surgery

## How is C.difficile spread?

C.difficile produces spores that can be spread in the environment in large numbers when a person has diarrhea. A spore is a germ with a coat that enables it to survive for a long time in the environment. Spores may be transported on the hands of people who have direct contact with infected people or with contaminated surfaces (e.g. bed frames, door handles).

## How do I know if I have C.difficile?

C.difficile infection usually causes watery diarrhea. A sample of diarrhea will be sent to the laboratory for testing, and you will be informed of the result.

# Clostridium Difficile Information

## Can C.difficile be treated?

Yes. Fortunately, most people only develop mild illness and stopping antibiotics (if possible) usually results in rapid improvement. Sometimes it is necessary to give specific antibiotic therapy to treat the C.difficile infection itself. Drinking plenty of clear fluids (e.g. water) to avoid dehydration is also important. Medication to stop the diarrhea will not be prescribed, as it may cause further irritation to the bowel.

## What happens in the hospital?

If C.difficile infection is confirmed and you have diarrhea, then you may be moved to another bed space. You will also be assigned a toilet/bathroom or commode specifically for your use. Staff will wear gloves and gown when they are engaged in caring for you or are in your room. Staff will wash and dry their hands before and after providing care and putting on/taking off gloves. This will help stop spread of C.difficile to patients in other areas.

## How can I stop the spread of C.difficile?

It is important that you wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water, particularly after going to the toilet and before eating food. If you cannot reach a sink, ask a member of staff to bring you a bowl of soapy water and a cloth.

## Will any of my treatments be delayed?

No. Most tests and treatments will continue, and staff will take the correct precautions. Sometimes, a non-urgent test may be delayed if you are experiencing severe diarrhea.

## Can C.difficile come back ?

Yes. Some patients treated for C.difficile infection may have a repeat of their symptoms. You should contact your GP if you develop diarrhea after discharge from hospital.

## How is VIHA preventing the spread of C.difficile?

VIHA takes C.difficile infections very seriously. We promote sensible use of antibiotics, rigorous cleaning procedures, and precautions for affected patients and thorough hand washing by all staff, patients and visitors to reduce the spread of C.difficile infection.

## Can I go home with C.difficile?

Yes, as long as your symptoms are settling and your medical team is satisfied that you are well enough to go home. They will let you know if you need to continue treatment at home.

## Can I have visitors if I have a C.diff Infection?

Yes. C.difficile is not a risk to healthy people. If visitors are unwell or taking antibiotics, they should not visit until they are completely well.

It is essential that all visitors wash their hands with soap and water before entering and leaving your room or bed space. Visitors are not required to wear gloves and gowns unless they are helping with personal care.

## Can my washing be sent home?

Yes. Laundry can be taken home and washed as usual. Where possible, wash laundry on a separate cycle at the highest temperature the fabric will tolerate. Hands should be washed with soap and water after handling soiled clothing.

If you have any questions that are not answered here, please ask a nurse on your ward, or ask to speak with a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team.

For more info, visit:  
[www.viha.ca](http://www.viha.ca)