

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile, also called *C. difficile*, is a germ that has been around for a long time. A small percentage of the population (approximately 5%) may be carriers of this bacterium in their intestines without having any health problems and therefore does not require treatment. In fact, it lives in harmony with other types of bacteria normally found in the human intestine. This germ has the capacity to survive in the environment.

NOSOCOMIAL INFECTIONS

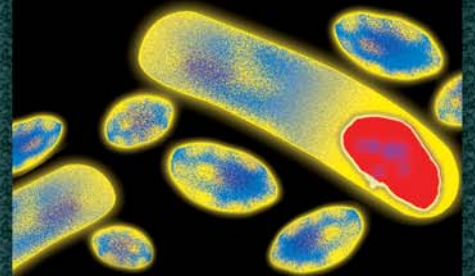
Québec 

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INFORMATION ON

Clostridium difficile



What is a *C. difficile* infection?

After an antibiotic treatment, the number of normal bacteria decreases, encouraging the *C. difficile* to multiply. When these bacteria multiply they produce a toxin which causes diarrhea.

What are the symptoms of a *C. difficile* infection?

The usual symptoms are diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps. Blood, mucous or pus may be found in the stools. As soon as a *C. difficile* infection is suspected, a stool analysis is performed to determine whether the bacteria and its toxin are present. In most cases, patients recover from this infection. People who are more vulnerable may experience complications such as a serious infection of the intestine, dehydration and, in certain cases, even death.

Who is at risk of for *C. difficile* infection?

The elderly, who already have health problems are at greater risk of catching *C. difficile* during their hospital stay. Taking certain antibiotics is, in most cases, the precipitating factor for the infection.

The risk of being infected is very low for healthy people.

How is *C. difficile* transmitted?

C. difficile is transmitted through contamination on the hands of a person who has diarrhea. The staff and visitors may pick up the germ on their hands during contacts with the patient or by touching objects in his environment (ex.: toilet flusher, taps or door knobs).

Can *C. difficile* be treated?

Yes. In each case, the doctor must evaluate if the situation requires treatment. If so, the doctor will recommend the appropriate antibiotic.

It is not necessary to have a control examination if the diarrhea stops with treatment; however, if the diarrhea persists or starts up again in the next few weeks, you should consult your doctor.

How can the spread of *C. difficile* in hospitals be prevented?

The infected person is placed in isolation in a private room or one shared between other infected patients. Other precautions are also taken such as having staff and visitors wear gloves and long-sleeved gowns and disinfecting the area every day. These measures are maintained for at least 72 hours after the diarrhea has stopped.

A sign is placed on the door of the room to remind employees and visitors to wash their hands and respect the precautions in place.

How can I avoid transmitting *C. difficile* at home?

When someone in the household has diarrhea caused by a *C. difficile* infection, the most effective and simplest method to prevent its transmission is for the patient and members of the family to wash their hands regularly.

Since certain objects and surfaces often touched by the patient may be contaminated, the patient's room and the bathroom should be cleaned more frequently, using liquid bleach (1 part liquid bleach diluted in 9 parts water).

Clothes may be washed as usual, using regular detergent and hot or warm water.

When should we wash our hands?

- After going to the toilet;
- Before and after taking care of a person who is infected by *C.difficile* or another microbe;
- After any contact with the patient's environment;
- Before preparing, handling or serving food, or eating;
- After having blown your nose, coughed or sneezed;
- After accidental contamination with blood or other biological fluids;
- When your hands are visibly dirty.