



CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE (*C. diff*) PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

One of your tests shows that you have *C. difficile* (*C. diff*). Staff will now take special precautions when taking care of you. This information sheet may help you and your family to understand the procedures more clearly.

WHAT IS *C. diff*?

C. diff is a kind of bacteria (germ) that can be found in the bowel (gut) of sick people and some healthy people. It can cause belly pain and diarrhea (loose stools or bowel movements (BM) many times a day).

CAN IT BE HARMFUL?

C. diff is a common cause of diarrhea for patients in the hospital or on antibiotics. It can cause mild to severe illness and can be spread to large numbers of patients in hospitals or nursing homes.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF *C. DIFF*?

C. diff infection can cause watery diarrhea, fever, nausea (sick at the stomach), poor appetite, belly pain and cramping. It is possible for *C. diff* to cause no symptoms of infection, but just live in (or "colonize") the gut.

HOW DID I GET *C. diff*?

C. diff is found in the large bowel of some people. If you have been on certain antibiotics or other medications, the normal balance of healthy bacteria (those that help you digest your food and protect against disease) and the harmful ones (bacteria that can make you sick) in your gut can change. This makes it easier for *C. diff* to grow and cause infection which may be called "colitis." People who are more likely to get *C. diff* colitis are those who are on antibiotics, have had stomach or gut surgery, have been in a hospital or nursing home, have other serious illness, have a weakened immune system, or are elderly. You may also pick up *C. diff* by having it spread to you from someone who is colonized or infected with *C. diff*.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Though hospitals maintain a high level of daily cleaning on all patient units, *C. diff* is a very strong germ. This is because *C. diff* has a form called spores (like very tiny seeds) that can live for a long time on surfaces and are hard to kill with some hospital cleaning products. *C. diff* is passed from the body in the stool (BM). Patients can pick up *C. diff* if they touch something that has the germs on it, and then touch their mouth. This is why careful hand washing and special precautions are so important. Hands should be washed with soap and water, because *C. diff* spores are not killed by alcohol handgel.

WHY ARE SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS NEEDED?

Special Precautions are needed in order to prevent the spread of *C. diff* to other patients in the hospital who are also ill and therefore more likely to develop an infection. At the University of Virginia Health System (UVA), patients with *C. diff* will be cared for in Contact Precautions, also known as Contact Isolation.

WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT?

- You will have a private room.
- Signs will be placed outside the room to remind everyone about the special precautions.

- You will be asked to stay in your hospital room as much as possible, leaving only when medically needed, as long as you are having loose stools.
- Anyone who enters the room to touch you or anything in the room will wear a gown and gloves.
- Visitors must also follow isolation precautions to minimize spread within the environment.
- All hospital workers and visitors must remove their gowns and gloves and wash their hands well with soap and water as they leave the patient's room. The hospital soap is used to remove *C. diff* spores from the hands because they are not killed by the alcohol hand gel.
- Please wash your hands carefully after going to the bathroom and before eating.

WHAT ABOUT FAMILY AND VISITORS?

You may still have visitors. They must wash their hands with soap and water when they come in and when they leave. They must put on gowns and gloves too.

WILL THIS GO AWAY?

Your doctor may recommend you drink plenty of water, avoid foods that may make you feel worse, and possibly eat yogurt or other supplements to help the healthy bacteria in your gut grow back. If the diarrhea becomes worse, your doctor may give you an antibiotic to stop the *C. diff* infection. Some patients may find that the diarrhea starts again after they stop the antibiotic, and they may need more medication for it.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN ISOLATION PRECAUTIONS?

You will be in Contact Precautions until you have a formed (firm, not watery) stool. If diarrhea starts again, you will need to be placed back in Contact Precautions, since this may be *C. diff* again (known as a "relapse"). You will have stool samples sent to the lab to be tested for *C. diff*.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I LEAVE THE HOSPITAL?

If you go to another hospital or nursing home, or if you go to a doctor's office, clinic, dentist or have visits from Home Care, some precautions may still be taken. This is to prevent your caregivers from picking up the germ and spreading it to other patients. Good hand washing with soap and water is very important to keep from spreading *C. diff* to others.

WHAT ABOUT AT HOME?

Once you go home, if you are still having diarrhea, you should continue with careful soap and water hand washing and clean the surfaces you touch, especially in the bathroom. You should drink liquids and eat foods as recommended by your doctor. If diarrhea stops but then starts again, you should call your doctor to talk about possible need for more antibiotics. If anyone is sick at home, you should check with their doctor to see if any special precautions are needed to protect them from *C. diff*.

HOW CAN I HELP?

If you need care from a doctor, hospital, home health provider, therapist, or other caregiver, please tell them you have *C. diff*. They may choose to care for you in special precautions as well. Hand washing with soap and water is the best thing you can do. Remind everyone to wash hands often.

WHAT IF I AM ADMITTED TO THE HOSPITAL AGAIN?

Whenever you are admitted to UVA hospital, if you are still having diarrhea, it is best if you are placed on Contact Precautions again until you have a formed stool.

If you are out of the hospital and have any questions, please call UVA Infection Prevention and Control at (434) 924-0260 and ask for the Outpatient Infection Control Nurse.

WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN AND WELL