

Clostridium difficile Associated Diarrhoea (CDAD)

A Guide for Patients

Hospitality
Healing
Stewardship
Respect

Calvary Hospital Infection Control & Staff Health Department

What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (C.difficile) is a bacterium that can cause mild to very severe diarrhea. C.difficile is the most frequent cause of infectious diarrhea in Australian hospitals and long-term care facilities (Nursing Homes etc). It can cause complications such as pseudo-membranous colitis (or life-threatening inflammation of the colon).

What are the symptoms of CDAD?

Symptoms include watery diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain and tenderness.

How do people get Clostridium difficile Associated Diarrhea (CDAD)?

Antibiotics alter the normal levels of good bacteria found in the bowels. When antibiotics destroy a person's good bowel bacteria, C.difficile can grow and produce toxins, which can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea (CDAD). However, some people can have C.difficile bacteria present in their bowels and not show symptoms. C.difficile bacteria and their spores are found in faeces. For healthy people, C.difficile does not pose a health risk. The elderly, those with other illnesses or who are taking antibiotics, are at a greater risk of infection. People can get infected if they touch surfaces contaminated with C.difficile then touch their mouths. It is possible for healthcare workers to spread the bacteria to their patients if healthcare workers' hands are contaminated.

How is CDAD diagnosed?

A sample of faeces from someone with diarrhoea is sent to the laboratory for testing. The laboratory checks for toxin-producing C.difficile bacteria. When C.difficile toxins are detected the patient is diagnosed as having CDAD.

What can be done to prevent the spread of C.difficile?

In healthcare settings C.difficile can be limited through careful use of antibiotics and strict adherence to infection prevention and control measures.

Frequent hand hygiene is an effective way of preventing the transmission of healthcare associated infections. Hand washing with antimicrobial hand wash is important during C.difficile outbreaks and is one of the best defenses against further spread of the bacteria. If you do not have access to hand washing facilities, frequent use of alcohol-based hand rub is encouraged. Most healthcare facilities provide alcohol-based hand rub at entrances to their buildings. Be sure to use them, but be aware that in CDAD they are less effective than hand washing as they do not destroy C.difficile spores.

If you work in or visit a hospital or long-term healthcare facility, wash your hands especially after using their toilet. Gloves should be worn by staff when caring for a patient with C.difficile infection or if in contact with his/her environment. Gloves should be changed between patients and hands should be washed after removing gloves.

When any antibiotic is prescribed for CDAD, follow your doctor, pharmacist, or healthcare provider's instructions and the directions on the label. Keep taking the antibiotic as prescribed in order to kill all of the C.difficile bacteria. If you have concerns about C.difficile and the medication you are currently using, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, or healthcare provider.

What will happen while you are in hospital?

If you have CDAD you will be placed in a single room or in a shared room with other CDAD patients

All staff need to wear a yellow gown and gloves when entering your room or bed space. This is to prevent the spread of CDAD to other patients.

If you have CDAD the doctor will treat you with antibiotics that can kill the C.difficile bacteria and treat CDAD.

It is important that you remain in your room to reduce the risk of spreading the C.difficile bacteria. If you need to leave your room, your hands should be washed prior to leaving. It is important that you do not visit patients in the ward or in other wards in the hospital. *Parents of infants in the hospital nursery may visit their children. Please inform your nurses, wash your hands and wear a yellow gown when in the nursery.*

If you are required to visit other departments for specific tests e.g. X-ray, the staff caring for you will inform the department before you are transferred there. Staff such as ward services officers and the staff performing the procedure on you will wear a gown and gloves. If they do not, please inform them that you have CDAD and that they should be taking precautions.

When you have commenced treatment with medication and your diarrhoea has stopped for at least 48 hours then isolation precautions in the hospital may be ceased for you. Your room or bed space should be cleaned each day. If this doesn't occur please inform the nurse caring for you.

What happens when you go home?

There is no need to do anything extra at home. Good general personal and household hygiene including hand washing is important to prevent the spread of CDAD to others.

Eating utensils and dishes can be washed as normal. You can return to work when you are well and your doctor says it is OK.

If you are a healthcare worker, check with Infection Control before returning to work.

If you go to your GP or another healthcare facility please tell them you have had CDAD.

If you have any questions about CDAD that have not been answered here, please ask your doctor or contact Calvary Hospital Infection Control & Staff Health Department ☎ 02 6201 6684