

# **Clostridium Difficile Information for patients and visitors**

### What is Clostridium difficile?

The bowel (gut) of healthy people contains germs that usually cause no harm. *Clostridium difficile* is the name of one of the germs that may be present in small numbers. Sometimes, as a result of taking antibiotics, some bacteria in the bowel are killed but *Clostridium difficile* is left behind and can reproduce in large numbers. It then irritates the bowel lining, causing symptoms that can include diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, loss of appetite, fever and nausea.

### Who is at risk of getting these symptoms?

- Anyone taking antibiotics. Taking more than one type of antibiotic increases the risk.
- People in hospital, especially elderly patients.
- People with inflammatory bowel disease.
- People who have had surgery on the stomach and/or bowel.
- People being treated for cancer.

### If I have Clostridium difficile how will it be treated?

- Where possible any antibiotics you are already taking will be stopped. The *Clostridium difficile* symptoms may then subside without further treatment. However, you may be given an antibiotic specifically to treat the *Clostridium difficile* infection. If so, the doctor prescribing this will instruct you on its use.
- It is very important that you do not become dehydrated. You should therefore continue to drink plenty of fluids to reduce this risk.

### How is Clostridium difficile infection spread?

- When *Clostridium difficile* causes diarrhoea it may contaminate the environment, where it can survive for a long time. It can then be picked up on other people's hands and transferred into the stomach and bowel by hand to mouth contact.

### If I have Clostridium difficile what can I do to prevent it spreading?

- The most important method of preventing spread is to wash your hands carefully with soap and water after you have been to the toilet and also before eating.
- It is equally very important that anyone cleans their hands after having contact with you or your immediate environment. Please feel free to ask staff to provide you with hand washing facilities when you need them and also prompt them or anyone else involved in your care to clean their own hands if you think they may have forgotten.
- If you need to send clothes home to be laundered, soiled clothes should be washed separately on as hot wash as possible. Do not overfill your washing machine or it will not clean properly.

### If I have Clostridium difficile will this affect my family or other visitors?

- Family and friends can still visit you, including children and pregnant women. If you have any concerns or questions please ask a nurse for advice.
- It is **not** necessary for visitors to wear gloves and aprons. If they are involved in your care, for example helping you to use the toilet, they should **wash their hands** thoroughly afterwards.
- It is important that all your visitors are discouraged from eating at your bedside and they should wash their hands on leaving your room or bed area.

### What type of follow-up care do I need once I am discharged?

- Once the symptoms have stopped and you have taken the full course of any specific antibiotic for *Clostridium difficile* infection, there is no need for follow-up.
- There is a possibility that the infection and diarrhoea may return within the first three weeks following treatment. This would be far more likely if you had to take antibiotics during this time. Your

doctor needs to know about your history of *Clostridium difficile* and if your symptoms do come back you should contact your doctor.

**If further advice is required, please contact the Infection Control Nurses on 0161 291 2630**