



APUA

Am I at risk for *C. difficile* Diarrhea?

Consumers and Patients

A Quick Reference Sheet from The Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics

What is *Clostridium difficile*?

Clostridium difficile, also known as *C. difficile*, is a bacterium that causes diarrhea and serious intestinal inflammation, such as colitis or gastroenteritis. It can also lead to sepsis and death (rare).

Symptoms of *C. difficile* Infection

- ✓ **Watery diarrhea** (at least 3 times per day for two or more days)
- ✓ **Fever**
- ✓ **Nausea**
- ✓ **Loss of Appetite**
- ✓ **Abdominal pain and/or tenderness**

**Symptoms often develop after taking antibiotics.*



For more information, visit the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA): www.apua.org

How does *C. difficile* Spread?

The contagious *C. difficile* bacteria are released in the feces of infected people. *C. difficile* spreads when a person touches an object or a surface that is contaminated with infected feces and then touches his/her mouth. Feces particles on these surfaces may be invisible to the naked eye. When diseases, such as *C. difficile*, are spread through infected feces ingested by another person, the disease has fecal-oral (feces-to-mouth) transmission.

*The elderly and people with prolonged use of antibiotics are at greater risk for contagious *C. difficile* infections*

Who is at risk for *C. difficile* infections?

Individuals in good health usually do not get *C. difficile* diseases. The people at the greatest risk for infection are: the elderly, people with underlying illnesses or weakened immune systems and people who have prolonged use of antibiotics for a serious medical condition. Overuse and misuse of antibiotics increases a person's risk of infection.



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How to Prevent *C. difficile* Infections:

- **Wash your hands** with soap and water before eating and preparing food, after using the bathroom or changing a diaper, and after visiting a hospital patient.
- **Use non-antibacterial disinfectants, such as bleach**, to clean household surfaces: kitchens, bathrooms, common spaces, etc. *C. difficile* can survive in the environment for up to 70 days after the initial infection.
- **Limit antibiotic use** to situations when your health care provider says you need an antibiotic to cure a serious bacterial infection. Do not demand antibiotics from your healthcare provider for conditions that cannot be cured by antibiotics, such as colds, the flu, and sore throats. Overuse and misuse of antibiotics can increase your risk of acquiring a *C. difficile* infection.



- **Properly dispose of wastes**, such as diapers.

How *C. difficile* infections are treated:

A stool sample is tested to determine if the patient's symptoms, particularly watery diarrhea, are being caused by the *C. difficile* toxin. If the stool sample contains the toxin that *C. difficile* produces, the diagnosis of *C. difficile* diarrhea is confirmed, and treatment is needed.

The patient's health care provider will determine how to treat the infection with the proper antibiotics. In general, most cases are treated for 10 days with an antibiotic that will not cause *C. difficile* diarrhea. Patients should not take antidiarrheal agents, such as Imodium®, for *C. difficile* diarrhea, because they increase the severity of the symptoms.

Overuse and misuse of antibiotics increases risk for *C. difficile* infections.

For more information on *C. difficile* infections, visit:

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- APUA Newsletter: http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/Newsletter/13_4a.html



Established in 1981, The Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (APUA)® is a non-governmental organization fighting to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics and other antimicrobials.