

# Fact Sheet

## C. difficile (Clostridium difficile)

### What is C. difficile?

Clostridium difficile (C. difficile) is one of the many types of bacteria that can be found in feces (bowel movements or stool).

For most people, C. difficile does not pose a health risk. When C. difficile bacteria grow in the bowel, they produce toxins which can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea.

### What are the symptoms?

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

### Who can get it?

For healthy people, C. difficile does not pose a health risk.

Those at higher risk include the elderly, people with severe underlying illness, and people taking certain antibiotics (especially over a prolonged period of time), cancer chemotherapy or other drugs.

People in healthcare settings are most at risk of getting this type of infection because C. difficile is often a healthcare-associated infection.

### How does a person get it?

C. difficile bacteria and their spores are found in stool. People can get infected if they touch surfaces contaminated with stool, and then touch their mouth. Healthcare workers can spread the bacteria to their patients if their hands are contaminated.

### What is the treatment for it?

For people with mild symptoms, no treatment may be required. For more severe cases, medication and sometimes surgery may be necessary.

### How can it be prevented?

- Wash your hands carefully with soap and water, especially after using the toilet, after touching dirty surfaces, and always before preparing or eating food.
- Wash dirty clothes and bed sheets or blankets separately, in hot water if possible.
- Clean surfaces that are touched often (faucets, door handles, countertops, light switches, etc). Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with stool such as the toilet and sink.