
Clostridium difficile Associated Disease (CDAD) Fact Sheet For Patients

What is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile* or *C. diff*)?

C. difficile is just one of the many types of bacteria that can be found in the environment and the bowel. *C-difficile* is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospitals and long-term care homes. It has been a known cause of healthcare-associated diarrhea for about 30 years.

What is *Clostridium difficile* Associated Disease (CDAD)?

For most people, *C. difficile* does not pose a health risk. When *C. difficile* bacteria grows in the bowel, it produces toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea, causing a disease known as *Clostridium difficile-associated Disease* (CDAD). The effects of CDAD are usually mild but sometimes can be more severe. Symptoms can range from mild or severe diarrhea to high fever, abdominal cramping, abdominal pain and dehydration. In severe cases, surgery may be needed, and in extreme cases CDAD may cause death.

What causes *Clostridium difficile* Associated Disease (CDAD)?

C. difficile associated disease (CDAD) can sometimes occur when antibiotics are prescribed. Antibiotics work by killing off bacteria – the bad bacteria – but also good bacteria. Without the presence of the typical “good” bowel bacteria, the *C. difficile* bacteria

may start to grow and produce toxins that can cause CDAD.

What are the Risk Factors for CDAD?

Certain people are at increased risk for acquiring CDAD. These risk factors include:

- A history of antibiotic usage
- Bowel surgery
- Chemotherapy
- Prolonged hospitalization

Additional risk factors that predispose some people to develop more severe disease include:

- Increased age
- Serious underlying illness or debilitation

How Will Your Doctor Know That You Have CDAD?

If you have symptoms of CDAD, your doctor will ask for a sample of your watery stool. The laboratory will test the stool to see if *C. difficile* toxins are present.

How is CDAD Treated?

Treatment depends on how sick you are. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe disease, antibiotics are required. Treatment of patients with CDAD should be initiated based on the individual patient risk factors and symptoms. Appropriate treatment will be determined by the patient’s attending doctor.

How Does CDAD Spread?

When a person has CDAD, the bacteria in the stool can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans, or commode chairs. When touching these items our hands can become contaminated. If we then touch our mouth without washing our hands, we can become infected. Our soiled hands can also spread the bacteria to other surfaces.

By always washing your hands and practicing good hygiene, you can greatly reduce your chances of picking up **any** bacteria – not just *C. difficile*.

What happens if I get CDAD while I'm a patient in the hospital?

You will be put on special precautions until you are free from diarrhea for at least two days. (All patients with diarrhea, not only those with *C. difficile*, should be put on these special precautions). Your activities outside the room may be restricted. All health care staff who enter your room must wear a gown and gloves. Everyone **MUST** clean their hands when leaving your room.

Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom and before eating. Cleaning hands is the most important way for everyone to prevent the spread of *C. difficile* and other germs. As well, a thorough cleaning of your room and equipment will be done to prevent spread of the infection. Ask your visitors to check in with nursing staff if they have not done so already.

What Should I Do at Home?

Healthy people like your family and friends who are not taking antibiotics are at very low risk of getting CDAD.

Hand hygiene

Wash your hands for at least 15 seconds with soap and water:

- After using the toilet
- After touching dirty surfaces
- Before eating
- Before preparing meals

Cleaning the house

Use an all purpose household cleaner. Follow the directions on the label, and:

- Wet the surface well and clean using good friction
- Allow the surface to air dry
- Pay special attention to areas that may be soiled with feces such as the toilet and sink. Remove any visible feces, and then clean as described above

Cleaning clothes/other fabric

Wash clothes/fabric separately if they are heavily soiled with feces:

- Rinse off feces
- Clean in a hot water cycle with soap
- Dry items in the dryer on high heat, if possible
- Dry clean where appropriate

Cleaning dishes

Regular cleaning – use the dishwasher or clean by hand with soap and water.

It is very important that you take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. You should not use any anti-diarrheal drugs from the drugstore that will stop your diarrhea. If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your doctor.

Adapted from the Ottawa Hospital *C. difficile* Fact Sheet.