



### WHAT IS C. DIFFICILE?

*C. difficile* (diff-ih-SEEL) is a type of bacteria that can cause lower belly (abdominal) discomfort, bloating, loose stools, and diarrhea. The “C” stands for Clostridium (kloss-TRID-eeum). The germs may be found on surfaces in the environment.

### WHO GETS C. DIFFICILE?

People more likely to get *C. difficile* are those who:

- Take antibiotics
- Have chemotherapy
- Have abdominal surgery
- Have other stomach or intestine problems
- Are already sick and in the hospital

### HOW DOES C. DIFFICILE SPREAD?

*C. difficile* bacteria live in the stomach and intestines, which are sometimes called the GI tract. GI stands for gastrointestinal.

When a person gets diarrhea from *C. difficile* infection, he or she can spread the bacteria in the environment. When an infected person touches an object with unwashed hands, *C. difficile* can spread to that object. Others who touch these items can contaminate their hands. Touching the face and mouth with unwashed hands allows the bacteria to get into the GI tract. This is how the illness passes from person to person.

### HAND WASHING

*C. difficile* can spread to other patients in the hospital. So it's very important to take steps to prevent *C. difficile* from spreading. Hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Alcohol-based cleaners are less effective in fighting *C. difficile*.

- You need to wash your hands well with soap and warm water.
- You should wash your hands before you eat and after you use the bathroom or bedpan.
- Ask your health care staff for assistance with handwashing if you need help performing this task.
- Health care staff should wash their hands before and after giving you care.
- Your visitors should wash their hands before they enter and after they leave your room, as well as after they help care for you, and before they eat.

### SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS

Special precautions may be used to prevent the spread of *C. difficile*. Some of the practices are listed below:

- You will be placed in special precautions as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). This may require a private room.
- Health care staff should wear protective clothing, such as a gown and gloves, when giving you care. Your visitors also may also need to wear protective clothing.
- Your nurse will review recommended precautions with you.
- Patients with *C. difficile* should not sit in patient lounges or go to the cafeteria.



- Some health care equipment may be kept in your room for your use only. Examples are a thermometer and blood pressure cuff.
- Personal items in your room can become contaminated. You should have few personal items in the room. Such items should be stored in drawers and closets to keep surfaces free to be cleaned well.

### **HOW IS C. DIFFICILE TREATED?**

Your doctor may tell you to stop taking some of your usual medicines. The doctor may prescribe a medicine for *C. difficile*.

### **WHEN YOU GO HOME**

If you no longer have diarrhea after you leave the hospital, you do not need to do anything special. However, good hand washing is always important.

If diarrhea returns, tell your doctor immediately. If you need to go back into the hospital, tell the doctors and nurses you have a history of *C. difficile*.

If you have diarrhea when you leave the hospital, follow the guidelines below. Family members who care for you also should follow these guidelines:

- Good hand washing is very important.
- Wash your hands well before you eat or prepare food.
- Wash your hands well after you use the toilet or bedpan.
- Wash your hands well before and after you care for a person with *C. difficile*.
- If possible, wear disposable gloves if you must handle stool.
- Clean the bathroom frequently.
- Put disposable wastes, like diapers or other such items, into plastic bags. Tie bags securely, and throw them out with the regular trash.
- If clothes are heavily soiled with stool, wash them separately in detergent and bleach. Clothes not soiled with stool can be washed with other clothing.

### **IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse. You also may contact DHR Health's Department of Infection Prevention and Control at (956) 362-7850.