



APUA

Determining your risk for *C. difficile* diarrhea

For 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. diff*, is a bacterium that causes diarrhea and serious intestinal inflammation, such as colitis or gastroenteritis. It can also lead to sepsis and death.



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. Those at 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.



Determining your risk for *C. difficile*

APUA

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 a 3% solution of 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. The spores (dormant forms) are very difficult to kill.
- **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 you 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.



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, 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 aggravate the 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 an international non-governmental organization fighting to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics and other antimicrobials.

September 2010