At Home

- Wash your hands with liquid soap and water before eating or handling food, after handling rubbish, after touching a public surface and especially after using the toilet.
- Follow the instructions for handwashing as provided previously.
- Avoid preparing food for others while you have diarrhoea.
- Do not share personal hygiene items (such as towels, face cloths and tooth brushes) with others.
- If you have diarrhoea, you should clean the toilet bowl, seat and toilet flush handle with a cleaning agent after using the toilet.
- Drink plenty of fluids to help prevent dehydration if you have diarrhoea.
- Tell family and friends not to visit if they are unwell.

Key Points

- You should wash your hands with liquid soap and water frequently.
- It is important that you pay particular attention to washing your hands after visiting the toilet.
- Avoid preparing food for others when you have diarrhea.
- Do not share personal hygiene items.
- If you are at home and have diarrhea, you should clean the toilet bowl, seat and flush handle with a cleaning agent after use.

For more information please ask the nurse looking after you, contact the facility’s Infection Control Unit or refer to:


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**What is Clostridium difficile?**

*Clostridium difficile* is a bacterium or germ that is found in the bowel. It is found in approximately 3% of healthy adults, and up to 20% of hospitalised patients.

It most commonly causes mild to moderate diarrhoea. Sometimes it can cause more serious infection of the intestines called colitis or a bloodstream infection. In rare cases, an infection with *Clostridium difficile* can lead to death.

*Clostridium difficile* was first recognised in the 1970’s as a common cause of diarrhoea in hospitalised patients.

**How do I get infected?**

You may have contact with *Clostridium difficile* from touching dirty surfaces or others who have the infection. If you take antibiotics to treat an infection, these antibiotics can kill the good and bad bacteria or germs in your bowel. When normal bacteria or germs in the bowel are disturbed, *Clostridium difficile* can multiply and produce toxins that irritate the bowel and cause diarrhoea.

The people most at risk of *Clostridium difficile* infection include those who have recently taken antibiotics, patients who have had gastrointestinal surgery, patients who have long hospital stays, patients taking gastric acid suppressive therapy and patients aged over 65 years.

**How do I know if I have it?**

If you are an inpatient in hospital and have or develop diarrhoea, a stool specimen will be collected and sent to the laboratory for examination. Your treating medical team will keep you informed of the specimen result.

**What are the symptoms?**

The most common symptom of *Clostridium difficile* infection is watery diarrhea (three or more loose bowel movements per day). Other symptoms can include fever, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal cramping or tenderness.

**How is it spread?**

*Clostridium difficile* is passed out in the faeces of people who are infected. It can survive for a long time in the surroundings, on many surfaces, in toilet areas, on clothing, sheets and furniture. People then ‘pick up’ *Clostridium difficile* by touching surfaces that have *Clostridium difficile* present and then touching their mouth or eating.

Healthcare workers can also spread the infection to themselves and others by not cleaning their hands.

**Is it treatable?**

Yes. If treatment is required, your medical team will discuss this with you. Usually, this treatment involves stopping the antibiotics you may be taking and starting a course of a different antibiotic to treat the *Clostridium difficile* infection.

**What about my visitors?**

It is important that all visitors wash their hands with liquid soap and water before entering your room and on exiting your room. Your visitors will be advised by staff if they need to wear an apron or gloves while visiting.

Please do not allow your visitors to sit or lie on your bed or to use your toilet.

**How can I protect those around me?**

**In Hospital**

- Wash your hands with liquid soap and water before eating or handling food, after handling rubbish, after touching a public surface and especially after using the toilet.

- Follow instructions for washing your hands:
  - Wet hands with running water then add liquid soap
  - Rub soap over all the areas of the hands, including between your fingers, thumbs and back of hands
  - Wash your hands for at least 10 seconds
  - Rinse your hands well and dry thoroughly with paper towel
  - Ask your visitors to follow all staff instructions and hospital protocols

- Keep your bedside area free from clutter as this makes cleaning easier