



# *C. diff*

*Clostridioides difficile*, formerly known as *Clostridium difficile*, is a gram-positive bacillus that causes diarrhea and colitis. *C. diff* is spore forming and some strains produce exotoxins. Risk of infection is 7 to 10 times more likely during or up to a month after antibiotic treatment. A weakened immune system, recent hospital stays, and previous *C. diff* infection also increases the likelihood of infection.

## School health and childcare provider information

### Cause

*C. diff* spores are activated after ingestion and begin reproducing in the small intestine. Once in the colon, the bacteria release toxins that damage the intestinal tissues which causes watery diarrhea.

### Symptoms

Common symptoms include watery diarrhea, fever, stomach pain, loss of appetite, and nausea. Complications that may occur include blood in stools, dehydration, toxic megacolon, and colitis (inflammation of the colon). Rare complications include sepsis and death.

### Spread

*C. diff* is spread by the fecal-oral route and by ingestion of spores found on contaminated surfaces. Spores remain viable for months to years on surfaces and in soil.

### Incubation

Unknown. Symptoms of colitis can develop 1 day after initiation of antimicrobial therapy, but most commonly 5 to 10 days. Colitis can develop up to 10 weeks after the end of antimicrobial therapy.

### Contagious period

A person is contagious if they are shedding *C. diff* in their stool. Asymptomatic intestinal colonization is common in children younger than 2 years; up to 50% of healthy infants are colonized and 5% to 12% of healthy children 5 to 18 years are colonized.

### Exclusion

*Childcare and School*

Childcare: children with *C. diff* should stay home from childcare until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped and until the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

*C. diff*

School: School-aged children do not have to stay home unless they are not feeling well enough to participate in routine activities or are having toileting accidents.

Exclude infected staff members who handle food while they have diarrhea.

## Diagnosis

Diagnostic laboratory testing is available.

## Treatment

In mild cases, people may get better once antibiotic treatment is stopped. If diarrhea continues, antibiotics may be used to treat *C. diff*. Severe infections may require hospitalization. Fecal microbiota transplants may be considered for recurrent infections.

## Prevention

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water especially after using the bathroom, handling soiled diapers, and prior to eating or preparing food. Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and laundry when someone is sick in the household. Wear gloves when diapering, cleaning soiled surfaces and doing laundry. Always wash hands after removing gloves.
- Take a shower with soap and water to remove bacteria on the skin.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Alcohol-based sanitizers are not effective in killing *C. diff* spores. Soap and water are more effective.
- Avoid antibiotic treatment if possible.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at 612-543-5230 or call your local health department.

Hennepin County Public Health  
Epidemiology  
612-543-5230  
[epi-envhlth@hennepin.us](mailto:epi-envhlth@hennepin.us)

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