



Frequently asked questions about *C. difficile*

Women's College Hospital takes your care and safety very seriously, and we are committed to transparency. On a monthly basis, beginning in September 2008, we will be reporting our *C. difficile* infection rates on our website.

If you have any questions about the information below or about our hospital's infection prevention and control program, please contact Sonja Cobham, Infection Control Practitioner at 416-323-640 x3102.

Measuring *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) rates

Women's College Hospital posts its infection rates online on a monthly basis. On this website, you can find information about hospital-acquired infection rates for *C. difficile*.

What is *C. difficile*?

C. difficile (*Clostridium difficile*) is a bacteria. *C. difficile* can be part of the normal bacteria in the large intestine and is one of the many bacteria that can be found in stool (a bowel movement).

A *C. difficile* infection occurs when other good bacteria in the bowel are eliminated or decreased allowing the *C. difficile* bacteria to grow and produce toxin. The toxin produced can damage the bowel and cause diarrhea. *C. difficile* is one example of a hospital-acquired infection and is one of the most common infections found in hospitals and long-term care facilities. *C. difficile* has been a known cause of health care associated diarrhea for about 30 years.

Who is at risk for *C. difficile*?

Healthy people are not usually susceptible to *C. difficile*. Seniors, and people who have other illnesses or conditions being treated with antibiotics and certain other stomach medications, are at greater risk of an infection from *C. difficile*.

What are the symptoms of *C. difficile*?

The usual symptoms are mild but can be severe. Main symptoms are watery diarrhea, fever, abdominal pain /tenderness. In some cases there may not be diarrhea. Blood may or may not be present in the stools.

How do you get *C. difficile*?

C. difficile is the most common cause of hospital associated infectious diarrhea. Since it can be part of the normal bacteria that live in the large intestine, taking antibiotics can change the normal balance of bacteria in your large intestine making it easier for *C. difficile* to grow and cause an infection. Old age and the presence of other serious illnesses may increase the risk of *C. difficile* disease.



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How does *C. difficile* spread?

When a person has *C. difficile*, the germs in the stool can soil surfaces such as toilets, handles, bedpans, or commode chairs. When touching these items, your hands can become soiled. If you then touch your mouth, you can swallow the germ. Your soiled hands can spread germs that can survive for a long time on other surfaces if not properly cleaned.

The spread of *C. difficile* occurs due to inadequate hand hygiene and environmental cleaning; therefore, proper control is achieved through consistent hand hygiene and thorough cleaning of the patient environment. Good hand hygiene i.e. washing hands thoroughly and often is the single-most effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases like *C. difficile*.

How is *C. difficile* diagnosed?

A lab specimen is collected and tested for the C difficile toxin.

How is *C. difficile* treated?

Treatment depends on how sick you are. People with mild symptoms may not need treatment. For more severe disease, antibiotics are required.

What precautions are used to prevent the spread of *C. difficile* in the hospital?

If you are in the hospital and have *C. difficile* diarrhea, your activities outside the room may be restricted. All health care staff who enter the treatment room will wear a gown and gloves.

Everyone **MUST** clean their hands when leaving the treatment room.

How does Women's College Hospital control the spread of *C. difficile*?

We control the spread of *C. difficile* through surveillance (identifying patients who are suspected of having *C. difficile* and placing them in isolation), hand hygiene and environmental cleaning.

Does Women's College Hospital track *C. difficile* cases?

Yes. We track cases as required by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

What Women's College Hospital is doing to improve patient safety:

Women's College Hospital is committed to the improvement of patient safety through staff education, patient education, surveillance, proper hand hygiene practices, and environmental cleaning.