

## **CLOSTRIDIUM DEFFICILE (klo-STRID-ee-um dif-uh-SEEL)**

### **What Is *Clostridium difficile*?**

*Clostridium difficile* is a spore forming bacteria that has been associated with outbreaks of diarrhea and colitis in hospital patients and long term care facility residents. Almost all patients at greater risk of acquiring *Clostridium difficile* diarrhea are elderly or have other illnesses or conditions requiring prolonged use of antibiotics.

**Symptoms and Duration:** Watery diarrhea is the most common symptom, but abdominal pain, fever, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal pain may also occur. Some patients may be asymptomatic until exposed to antibiotic treatment.

**Incubation Period:** There is no incubation period. People in good health usually don't get *Clostridium difficile* disease, only people that are hospitalized or on antibiotics are most likely to become ill.

**Recovery, Long Term Effects & Immunity:** In the majority of patients, the illness is mild and full recovery is usual, although, elderly patients may become seriously ill with dehydration as a consequence of diarrhea. Treatment is not recommended if there are no symptoms. In people with mild diarrhea, stopping the use of antibiotics together with fluid replacement usually results in rapid improvement. Sometimes, however, it is necessary to give specific therapy against *Clostridium Difficile* itself. Antidiarrheal agents such as Imodium or Lomotil have been shown to increase the severity of symptoms and should be avoided.

### **How Is *Clostridium difficile* Spread?**

People with *C. difficile* infections carry the bacteria in their intestines. The bacteria produce a spore, which is shed in the feces of an infected person. The bacteria can be passed from person to person through direct contact, environmental contamination (bedding, commodes, bedpans, sinks, anal thermometers, handrails, etc) and can be carried on the hands of health care workers as they move from patient to patient. The spore can survive in the environment for up to 70 days. They prefer to live in dry, dusty areas.

### **How Do You Prevent *Clostridium difficile* Infection?**

- **Thorough hand washing is the best prevention.** Hands should be washed after handling contaminated waste (including diapers) and prior to eating, feeding, or providing personal care.
- Follow enteric precautions with known cases of *C. difficile* in health care facilities to limit the spread of the illness to others.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT**  
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