Indiana State Department of Health | Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About… *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI)

What is CDI?
Clostridium difficile (*C. difficile*) is one of many types of bacteria that are found in the colon (bowel). CDI occurs when antibiotics kill other bowel bacteria and allow *C. difficile* to overgrow. As *C. difficile* grows, it produces toxins. These toxins can damage the bowel, causing diarrhea and other intestinal problems. Sometimes, *C. difficile* causes more serious problems that require hospitalization and, in rare instances, can cause death.

How is CDI spread?
C. difficile is spread in stool (bowel movements) and can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, commodes, handles, bathing tubs, and electronic rectal thermometers. After touching these items with your hands and then touching your mouth without washing your hands, you can become infected. Soiled hands can also spread *C. difficile* to other surfaces. The ability of *C. difficile* to form spores allows the bacteria to survive in the environment for weeks or months. Healthcare workers can spread the bacteria to other patients or contaminate surfaces by touching them.

Who is at risk for CDI?
Your risk is higher if you:

- Had recent antibiotic use
- Had gastrointestinal surgery
- Have been a patient in a healthcare facility within the past year
- Have a serious underlying illness
- Have a weakened immune system due to illness (chemotherapy, HIV/AIDS)
- Are 65 years or older

How do I know if I have CDI?
See your healthcare provider. Symptoms of CDI may include:

- Watery diarrhea (at least three bowel movements per day for two or more days)
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea

- Abdominal pain or tenderness

If you have symptoms of CDI, your doctor will ask for a sample of your stool. A laboratory will test the stool to see if *C. difficile* toxins are present.

How can CDI be treated?

Your healthcare provider may prescribe an antibiotic. Be sure take it exactly as directed and finish all doses. If you were taking antibiotics when the CDI developed, that antibiotic may be stopped by your healthcare provider. (See Quick Facts about Antibiotic Use and Antibiotic Resistance at http://www.in.gov/isdh/21166.htm). If diarrhea persists or comes back, contact your healthcare provider.

How is CDI prevented?

To reduce your risk of developing CDI, you should do the following:

- Properly wash your hands with soap and water, especially after using the restroom and before eating. (See Quick Facts about Hand washing at http://www.in.gov/isdh/21926.htm.)
- Frequently clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas with household detergent/disinfectants (bleach-containing disinfectants may provide the best results).

For more information, please refer to:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/id_Cdiff.html

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