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**HARLEY STREET CLINIC®**

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part of **HCA**Healthcare uk

CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE  
INFORMATION LEAFLET

## WHAT IS CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE?

Clostridium difficile (sometimes referred to as C-diff) is a bacterium that can be found in the human gut of approximately three per cent of healthy adults. It is much more common in babies as up to two thirds may have Clostridium difficile in the gut, where it rarely causes problems. It is a bacterium that does not require oxygen to grow (referred to as anaerobic) and produces spores that can survive in the environment for long periods of time.

### *How do you catch it?*

It usually occurs because you have been given antibiotics as part of your treatment. These antibiotics disturb the normal balance of bacteria in your gut and allow *Clostridium difficile* to grow in greater numbers and produce toxins. It is possible for the infection to spread from person to person because when you are suffering from *Clostridium difficile* you shed spores in your faeces.

### *What symptoms do you have?*

The effects of *Clostridium difficile* vary from no symptoms in some cases to diarrhoea of varying severity. Other symptoms include loss of appetite, fever, nausea and stomach pain or tenderness. In unusual cases it can cause severe inflammation of the bowel.

### *Is it true that some patients are more at risk of *Clostridium difficile* associated disease than others?*

Yes, this is true. Generally the risk increase in patients with the following:

- Antibiotic treatment
- Advanced age
- Gastrointestinal (bowel/gut) surgery
- Long length of stay in healthcare settings
- A serious underlying illness
- Immunocompromising conditions.

### *What treatment do patients receive?*

If you are on antibiotics these may be stopped. You may then be given a different antibiotic that is used specifically for anaerobic bacteria (does not require oxygen to grow). You will be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids to maintain your hydration and may be given fluids through a tube in your arm if required.

*What should we do to prevent the spread of Clostridium difficile to others?*

To reduce the chance of the infection spreading it is advisable to wash your hands with soap and water. This is especially important after using the toilet and before eating or drinking. Try to keep bathroom and kitchen surfaces clean using household detergents or disinfectants.

*How will the hospital prevent the spread of Clostridium difficile?*

The ability of Clostridium difficile to form spores enables it to survive for long periods in the environment such as floors and toilets and disperse in the air during bed making.

Unfortunately when you have diarrhoea, especially if severe, this may unintentionally spread the infection to other patients. We will try and reduce the spread of the spores that you will excrete by caring for you in a single room.

This single room may be ensuite or you may have your own dedicated commode. Staff will wear disposable gloves and aprons when caring for you and when dealing with body

fluids. Our staff will be careful to wash their hands effectively after contact with infected patients and their surroundings. Rigorous cleaning with soap and water followed by a peracetic acid solution is the most effective way of reducing spores in the environment.

*Can you still have visitors?*

Yes you are still able to have visitors, but visiting may be restricted. If you have any concerns regarding visiting please discuss these with your nurse or doctor.

*Are there any extra precautions for visitors to take?*

We want to keep our wards hygienic and free from infection. Alcohol hand rub is ineffective against C diff so please ensure your visitors wash their hands with soap and water on entering and leaving your room. Those visitors who do come to visit should be extra careful not to carry infection in or out of the ward area. If your visitors need to do anything else, your nursing staff will let you and them know.

*Will patients have to stay in a side room for the rest of my stay in hospital?*

When you no longer have diarrhoea for over 48 hours, or your stool is formed you will be able to come out of isolation. You can continue to excrete the spores in your stool for some time, but this will be less of a problem once you are not suffering from diarrhoea.

*Can you get it again?*

There is a risk of relapse in 20-30 per cent of patients. Most cases of *Clostridium difficile* diarrhoea make a full recovery, however, elderly patients with underlying conditions may have a more severe course. Occasionally, infection in these circumstances may be life threatening.

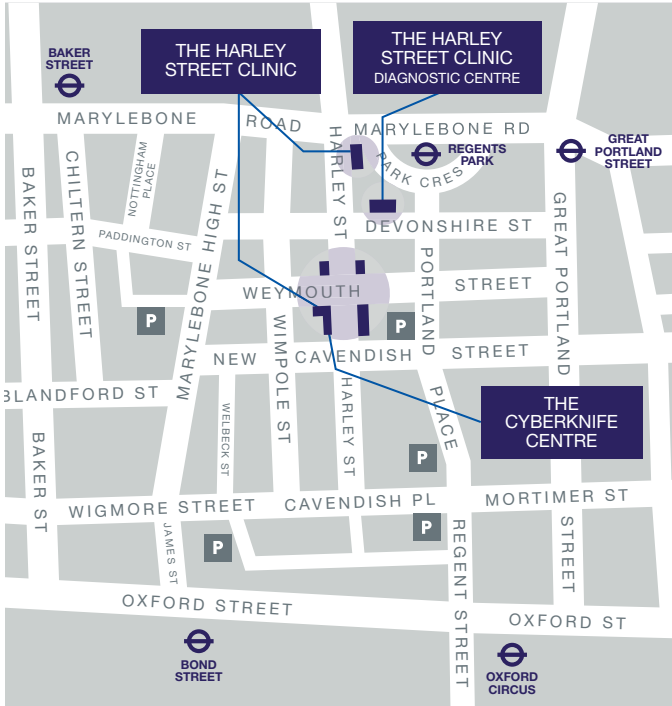
*What should you do if the symptoms return when you are at home?*

If the diarrhoea returns when you have been discharged you should contact your GP immediately. Please inform them that you have recently been discharged from hospital and had *C diff* diarrhoea. Do not leave symptoms to continue for a prolonged period before seeking medical advice. Do not take any self

medicating anti-diarrhoeal medicine without contacting your doctor.

*Further information*

The team at the hospital offer guidance in accordance with Department of Health best practice recommendations. If you would like any advice about infection prevention and control please call 020 7935 7700 and ask to speak to the Infection Control Lead.



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