

FACTS



Clostridium difficile (*Clostridium difficile* Associated Diarrhea-CDAD)

What is it?

Clostridium difficile is a bacterium that causes diarrhea and more serious intestinal conditions, such as colitis. It is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospitalized patients in the industrialized world. It is also one of the most common infections in hospitals and long-term care facilities.

The use of antibiotics increases the chances of developing CDAD. Treatment with antibiotics alters the normal levels of good bacteria found in the intestines and colon and when there are fewer of these good bacteria, *C. difficile* can thrive and produce toxins that can cause an infection. The combination of the presence of *C. difficile* in hospitals and health care settings and the number of people receiving antibiotics in these settings can lead to frequent outbreaks.

How do people get CDAD?

Healthy people are not usually vulnerable to CDAD. People who have other illnesses or conditions, requiring prolonged use of antibiotics, and the elderly are at greater risk of infection. *C. difficile* bacteria are normally found in faeces. People can become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with faeces and then touch their mouths or mucous membranes. Health care workers can spread the bacteria to other patients or contaminate surfaces through hand contact. As with any infectious disease, frequent hand washing is one of the best defenses.

What are the symptoms of CDAD?

- watery diarrhea (at least 3 bowel movements per day for 2 or more days)
- fever
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- abdominal pain or tenderness

In rare cases, CDAD can be fatal. More commonly, the infection causes diarrhea, which can lead to serious complications, such as dehydration.

— *Health & Environment Facts* —

How can CDAD be treated?

For people with mild symptoms, no treatment is required. The symptoms usually clear up once the patient stops using antibiotics. For severe cases, medication and surgical interventions may be required.

What should I do to prevent the spread to others?

If you are infected you can spread the disease to others; however, only people that are hospitalized or on antibiotics are likely to become ill. Some precautions to reduce the chance of spread to others are:

- wash hands with soap and water, especially after using the restroom and before eating
- clean surfaces in bathrooms, kitchens and other areas on a regular basis with household detergent/disinfectants

*Public Health Agency of Canada
CDC*