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Antibiotic-Associated Diarrhea and Clostridium difficile (C.diff)

A Guide for Patients & Visitors



Discharge Information

- Your healthcare provider will review good hygiene practices with you before discharge.
- Take all prescribed medications as directed.
- Avoid using over-the-counter anti-diarrhea drugs like Imodium without consulting your doctor.
- If diarrhea persists or returns, contact your family doctor and inform them of your recent antibiotic use.



Additional Resources

- Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care: health.gov.on.ca
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): cdc.gov

What is Antibiotic-Associated Diarrhea?

Although antibiotics are known to save lives by treating infections, it is important to understand that they can also disrupt the normal balance of bacteria in your intestines, and irritate the stomach lining, sometimes leading to diarrhea.

Why can Diarrhea Occur with Antibiotics?

Antibiotics kill not only the harmful bacteria but also the good bacteria in your bowel, upsetting the natural balance. This can allow harmful bacteria such as C.diff to overgrow.

Symptoms of Antibiotic-Associated Diarrhea:

Loose and frequent bowel movements, watery diarrhea (possibly containing mucus and/or blood), abdominal pain or tenderness, loss of appetite, nausea, and fever.

What Should You Do If You Get Diarrhea?

- Mild diarrhea: Continue taking antibiotics; symptoms should resolve after the medication is finished.
- Severe symptoms (bloody diarrhea, abdominal pain, fever): Contact your doctor immediately.

Self-Care Tips:

- Follow your doctor's advice regarding rest, activity, medication, and diet.
- Wash your hands frequently, especially after using the washroom and before eating or preparing food.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

What is Clostridium difficile (C.diff)?

A bacterium that causes severe diarrhea and other intestinal issues.

How Do People get C.diff?

Through ingestion of spores, lack of hand hygiene and antibiotic exposure (most often)

Symptoms of C.diff:

Watery Diarrhea, possibly containing mucous and/or blood, abdominal pain/tenderness, loss of appetite, fever, nausea.



Diagnosis and Treatment

Diagnosis: A stool sample will be tested for C. diff toxins.

Treatment: All cases require antibiotics, and severe cases may need surgery.

Prevention in Hospital

- Handwashing is the most important measure to prevent the spread.
- Patients with C. diff will be isolated in a private room, and healthcare providers will use gloves and gowns when providing care.
- Visitors are encouraged to clean their hands upon entering and exiting the patient's room.

Preventing the spread of C. diff

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds after using the toilet, before eating and before preparing food.
- Caregivers should also wash their hands after providing care.
- Use gloves when handling body fluids or dirty items, and dispose of disposable gloves in the regular garbage or clean rubber gloves after use.
- During an active C. diff infection, wash clothes in hot water
- Clean surfaces with a 1:10 bleach-water solution, focusing on toilets, sinks, and high-touch areas like handrails, doorknobs, and light switches.
- Allow surfaces to air dry to ensure the cleaning product has enough contact time to kill bacteria.

