

It is sensible to be very hygienic when you are at home, even if you do not have an infection. Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, before preparing food and before eating. Keep bathrooms, showers and toilets, including taps, toilet doors and toilet flush handles clean.

**Do not share personal hygiene items, such as toothbrushes and towels, with other family members.**

### If I am worried – who can I talk to?

If you or any of your visitors are still unsure of the advice given above please speak to one of the nurses or doctors who are caring for you. For urgent support and specialist advice contact The Christie Hotline on the telephone number below.

### Further information

Department of Health: [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

Health Protection Agency: [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact [the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net)

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.

Contact The Christie Hotline for urgent support and specialist advice  
**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**  
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Infection prevention and control

## Information for patients with Clostridium difficile infection

### What is Clostridium difficile?

Clostridium difficile (also known as C.diff or CDI), are bacteria (germs) which live in the intestine (gut) of some people without causing any problems. The bacteria are normally kept under control by other bacteria that live in the gut. However, some medications alter the conditions in the gut allowing C.diff to multiply. It then produces toxins that cause diarrhoea and, in rare cases, severe inflammation of the bowel.

### What are the signs and symptoms of C.diff?

Diarrhoea caused by Clostridium difficile is usually ‘explosive’ and very smelly. Other symptoms include abdominal pain and fever (high temperature). Some people can have worse symptoms than others. In some cases the infection can be so severe it is life-threatening. This is rare.

### How did I get C.diff?

C.diff produces spores (like seeds) which are very hardy and resistant to high temperatures. Spores are passed out with the stools (faeces) of people who have C. diff in their gut. Spores can persist in the environment (for example, on clothes, bedding, surfaces, etc.) for several months or years. The spores can also be spread through the air (for example, when shaking bedclothes when making a bed). They may get on to food and into the mouth and gut of some people. Spores that get into a human gut develop into mature bacteria. So, this is how some



people end up with C.diff living harmlessly in their gut. However, if the number of C.diff bacteria increases greatly in the gut then it can cause problems. The most common reason why this occurs is due to taking antibiotics. The bacteria may have been in your bowel before you came into hospital without causing you any harm, or you may have acquired them since your admission.

If you have symptoms of diarrhoea, a sample will be taken and sent to the laboratory. The results will normally be available within 24 hours. It is important to let your doctor or nurse know if you start with diarrhoea whilst in hospital.

### **What does my result mean?**

A sample of diarrhoea is sent to the hospital laboratory where the diagnosis can be confirmed. The laboratory carries out various tests. Two tests are carried out on all samples, to see if C.diff is causing an infection. If our tests show that your sample is C.diff positive. This means that you have C.diff in your bowel.

### **What does it mean for me?**

The diarrhoea you are experiencing may be due to other causes, such as antibiotics. Your doctor will review your medication and make any necessary changes as sometimes antibiotics can cause the C.diff bacteria to start producing toxins.

The majority of patients do not need treatment if they have C.diff positive result. However, if your symptoms are very severe, your doctor may decide to give you treatment.

It is important to drink plenty whilst you have diarrhoea to stop yourself becoming dehydrated.

**NOTE:** If your diarrhoea continues, we may need to test further samples.

### **What else should I do?**

It is possible for the bacteria present in your bowel to spread to other people. C.diff bacteria can be spread from one person to another by

poor hand hygiene (not enough hand washing). Washing your hands using soap and water is extremely important. **Alcohol hand sanitiser does not kill the C.diff bacteria.**

### **Where will I be cared for if I have C.diff?**

If you are sharing a 'bay' with other patients (and you are experiencing symptoms), you will be moved into a single room (side room), where you will remain most likely for the duration of your stay at The Christie. Staff will wear gloves and aprons when caring for you and will wash their hands thoroughly before leaving the room. Your environment will be kept as clean as possible. It is important to reduce the number of personal belongings you have in your room to make cleaning easier and more effective.

### **Will it affect my visitors, family and friends?**

C.diff is not a risk to healthy people, however, your family and friends should protect themselves when they are visiting you by:

1. Washing their hands with soap and water:
  - when leaving your room
  - after using the toilet
  - before eating and before preparing food
2. Not visiting if they are unwell or have recently had diarrhoea.
3. Not sitting on hospital beds when visiting.
4. Observing any restrictions that are in place as these help us to make sure the ward is cleaned thoroughly throughout the day.

Visitors do not need to wear gloves and aprons when visiting unless they are caring for you.

### **What do I need to do at home?**

If you are well, having C.diff will not stop you from going home. It is important you tell your GP or healthcare provider of the result when you see them in the future, especially if you receive antibiotic treatment. We will also tell your GP about your result.