A simple guide to Clostridium Difficile (C.difficile)

This guide explains C.difficile and how it can cause infection
**What is C. difficile?**

C. difficile bacteria can be found living in the large intestine of a small proportion (less than 5%) of the healthy adult population. It is also common in the intestines of babies and infants. It is normally kept in check by the ‘good’ bacterial population of the intestine. It can cause illness when antibiotics disturb the balance of the ‘normal’ bacteria in the gut (bowel).

**What are the symptoms?**

C. difficile can cause diarrhea, ranging from mild to severe with inflammation of the bowel. Other symptoms may include fever, loss of appetite, nausea and abdominal tenderness. It is difficult to diagnose on symptoms alone, so a sample of faeces (a stool specimen) is required for laboratory testing.

**How do you catch it?**

C. difficile can be spread from person to person by the ingestion of C. difficile (faecal-oral route). The spores can survive for a long time in the environment and can be spread by hands and contaminate equipment such as commodes, bedpans and toilets. To reduce the risk of spreading C. difficile you should wash your hands with soap and water, especially after using the toilet and before eating.

**Who is at risk of getting it?**

Elderly people are more at risk: over 80% of cases are reported in people over the age of 65 years. People with low immunity and patients who have undergone repeated bowel surgery or enemas are at increased risk of developing C. difficile. Members of staff are rarely affected.
How can it be treated?

If you have an infection you will need to be treated with antibiotics but if you are only colonised with the bacteria, no treatment will be required.

How can we stop the spread of C.difficile?

There are a number of ways in which Livewell Southwest is working to prevent and control infection. Policies and procedures are in place throughout the organisation and infection control education is provided to all staff.

Unfortunately, patients with diarrhoea may be susceptible to incontinence, which may unintentionally spread the infection to other patients. In addition, the C.difficile bacterium has the ability to form spores that can live for long periods in the environment. Rigorous cleaning is an important part of preventing the spread of C.difficile as the spores can be difficult to remove from the environment. Hands should be washed with soap and water before applying alcohol hand rubs. Please do not be afraid to ask staff to wash their hands.

Patients with C.difficile will be moved to an isolation room and barrier nursing implemented. Strict hand washing with soap and water is essential for patients, staff and visitors. Environmental cleaning procedures will be increased. If there is an outbreak of C.difficile the Infection Prevention and Control Team may introduce special measures for staff, patients and visitors to follow.

With your help, we will do all we can to prevent you from getting this infection. If you do get it, further information will be given to you by the doctors and nurses caring for you.
Five Stage Hand Washing Technique

1. Wet hands with running water
2. Apply enough liquid soap to cover all hand surfaces
3. Wash
4. Rinse hands with running water
5. Dry thoroughly with a paper towel

When using our services please do not be afraid to ask members of staff to wash their hands.

If you have any further questions or comments, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff.

Livewell Southwest
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