



Guidance for Mitigation of *C. diff* (*Clostridioides difficile*) in Community Congregate Settings

Background:

C. diff (also known *Clostridioides difficile* or *C. difficile*) is a bacterium that causes diarrhea and colitis (an inflammation of the colon). Most cases of *C. diff* occurs when you have been taking antibiotics or not long after you finish them. This is because antibiotics kill both good and bad bacteria in the body, putting individuals at increased risk of additional harmful infections. *C. diff* is spread from person to person through their stool. When the bacteria are outside the colon – virtually anywhere in the environment – they are in a dormant state, or essentially shutdown. This enables them to survive for a long time in any number of places:

- Human or animal feces
- Surfaces in a room
- Unwashed hands
- Soil
- Water
- Food, including meat

When bacteria once again find their way into a person's digestive system, they "wake up" and can begin to produce infection again. The ability of dormant *C. diff* to survive outside the body enables the generally easy transmission of the bacterium, particularly in the absence of thorough handwashing and cleaning. Some people who come in contact with *C. diff* bacteria do not get sick, though they can carry them on or in their body and can spread them to other persons. There are several prevention measures that can be put in place to prevent the spread *C. diff* in community congregate settings, including good hand hygiene and following [contact and standard precautions](#).

Symptoms Associated with *C. diff*:

Symptoms associated with *C. diff* include:

- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Stomach tenderness or pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea

How long does it take from exposure to onset of symptoms?

A person usually develops symptoms 5-10 days after starting a course of antibiotics. However, they may occur as soon as the first day or up to 3 months later.

It is possible that someone who has come into contact with *C. diff* may carry the bacteria, but not show any signs or symptoms, this is called colonization. Someone who has been colonized with *C. diff* does not require treatment, but they can still spread it to others unknowingly. Colonization is more common than infection (symptomatic illness) and typically lasts a few months.

Risk Factors Associated with *C. diff*:

Most cases of C. diff occur when a person has been taking antibiotics or not long after they finish it (typically within the first month following treatment). There are certain factors that puts a person at risk for C. diff. Including those who:

- Are 65 or older
- Recently stay at a hospital or nursing home
- Are persons with a weakened immune symptom,
- Are persons who have had a previous infection or have come in contact with C. diff.

Immediate Next Steps for Case Treatment and Monitoring:

Upon the identification of a resident or staff with symptoms consistent with C. diff:

1. If a resident is displaying signs and symptoms of a potential C. diff infection, they should be promptly referred to a healthcare for proper diagnosis and treatment.
2. Residents with confirmed or suspected C. diff should be isolated away from others and if possible, have their own bathroom. If having a separate bathroom for infected residents is not possible, ensure proper cleaning and disinfection is occurring after each use by the case. Learn more on the difference between cleaning and disinfecting here: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/selected-epa-registered-disinfectants>.
3. Following a diagnosis, residents should be placed under [contact precautions](#) (All staff should wear gloves and gowns when handling or cleaning any bodily fluids) and avoid contact with other residents for the duration of their illness.
4. Cases should be provided supportive measures for management of C. diff including fluid replacement and symptom management.
5. Ensure the case is following the treatment plan given by their healthcare provider and that all medications are taken for the frequency and duration indicated by the prescribing provider.
6. Continue to monitor other staff and residents for any signs and symptoms associated with C. diff and refer others to healthcare providers, as needed.
7. Cases of C. diff can end isolation **48 hours** following the resolution of symptoms.
8. Contact the Special Populations team at the Chicago Department of Public Health to report any cases of C. diff here: <https://redcap.link/specpopreport>

Preventing C. diff:

C. diff is contagious, it is easily spread person to person through their stool. There are things that could be done to prevent the spread of C. diff. The most import of these is to frequently wash your hands with soap and water, because alcohol-based hand sanitizers don't effectively destroy C. diff spores and to clean and disinfect area used by the case with bleach and water. More information on appropriate cleaning products can be found here: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-k-antimicrobial-products-registered-epa-claims-against-clostridium>. Additionally, soiled laundry should be washed separately with hot water and handled with proper PPE including gloves and a gown, when possible.

Organization	Contact Information
CDPH Community Congregate Settings Team	Email: SpecialPops@cityofchicago.org Reporting Link: https://redcap.link/specpopreport