

Clostridium difficile: A Cause of Diarrhea in Children

Clostridium difficile is a bacterium that causes inflammation of the part of the intestine called the colon. It is sometimes called *C diff* for short. These bacteria are found in feces (bowel movement). A major risk factor for getting a *C difficile* infection is being on antibiotics. People can also become infected by *C difficile* if they touch an object such as a toy or a surface such as a counter that has feces on it and then touch their mouth or a mucous membrane such as the eye or nose. It is the most common cause of health care–associated diarrhea in the United States. While most health care–associated infections are caused by getting someone else’s infection, *C difficile* infection is most commonly caused by antibiotic treatment, which changes the bacteria in your intestines.



SYMPTOMS OF *C DIFFICILE* INFECTION

- Watery diarrhea, with at least 3 bowel movements a day for 2 or more days, which may contain blood
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain

People with severe infection may develop serious inflammation of the colon and have little or no diarrhea.

Complications of *C difficile* infection can include dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, low blood pressure, and more serious concerns such as bowel perforation, kidney failure, or even death.

Research studies have suggested that *C difficile* infection–related hospitalizations are highest among children aged 1 to 4 years. The major risk factors for children to get *C difficile* infection are having recently taken antibiotics or having been immunosuppressed such as with steroid medications or chemotherapy.

Prevention of *C difficile* infection can be done by being very careful about washing hands before touching your child, especially if you or your child has recently been ill with diarrhea. Cleaning surfaces of counters and toys after your child has been ill is also a helpful strategy. It is also important to avoid unnecessary antibiotic use.

Infection with *C difficile* is typically diagnosed when a physician identifies the clinical symptoms, and laboratory testing of a stool sample may be done. If your child has the symptoms described, be sure to tell your pediatrician whether he or she has recently been on antibiotics. Infection with *C difficile* can be treated with certain antibiotics that are effective for that bacterium. A recent article in *JAMA Pediatrics* reviewed *C difficile* infections in children and described the appropriate management of these infections.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/cdiff/Cdiff-patient.html>

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