

Clostridioides difficile Infection

Patient Education Script for Health Care Workers

How to use this script

Use this script to help provide education on ***Clostridioides difficile* (C. diff) infection** to a patient. The talking points below can help you engage in discussion and ensure your patient's answers and needs are answered. Be sure to give the patient a copy of the fact sheet to help reinforce the information you provide to them verbally.

Step 1: Provide the purpose

After a patient has been diagnosed with a *C. diff* infection, share with them that you'd like to talk to them about their infection, the causes and how it spreads, symptoms and complications to be aware of, as well as treatment and prevention measures.

Suggested script

[Patient name], you've been diagnosed with *C. diff* infection. I'd like to provide you some information so that you can keep yourself and those around you healthy.

Step 2: Introduce the fact sheet

Provide the patient or present a family member with the printed fact sheet (page 3). Explain why you are providing it.

Suggested script

- I have this fact sheet I want to share with you. It has facts on *C. diff* infections and tips for staying healthy.
- I'd like to briefly read through it with you and make sure I address any questions or concerns you may have.

If the patient agrees, you can begin to briefly skim through the fact sheet content with them.

Step 3: Explain what *C. diff* is and how it occurs

Summarize the "What is *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*)?," "Causes and spread," and "Who is at risk?" sections of the patient fact sheet. Provide supplemental information specific to the patient's cause of infection and individual risk factors.

Suggested script

- *C. diff* is a bacteria that can spread person to person through poop or contaminated surfaces. You can get an infection when the *C. diff* bacteria enters your gut.
- Most infections occur after taking antibiotics and in people who are older or get frequent health care. But you can get the infection even if you have none of these risk factors.

Step 4: Describe symptoms and complications

List possible symptoms of *C. diff* infection and what complications to be aware of.

Suggested script

- Symptoms you may [experience/be experiencing] include diarrhea, fever, stomach tenderness or pain, loss of appetite, or nausea. These are all common and expected symptoms.
- There are also common complications associated with *C. diff* infection, like dehydration from frequent diarrhea. Inflammation of the colon, or gut, is also possible. This is called colitis.
- Rare complications include a serious gut condition called toxic megacolon; sepsis which is a severe response to an infection; and death.
- If you are concerned about your symptoms, contact your health care team immediately.

Step 5: Explain treatment and reinfection

Next, explain treatment options and the potential for reinfection. Provide supplemental information about their specific treatment plan if known.

Suggested script

- *C. diff* infection can usually be treated by taking specific antibiotics for at least 10 days. These antibiotics may include vancomycin or fidaxomicin.
- If you are taking antibiotics for another reason, you may be advised to stop taking them if it is safe to do so.
- In some cases, your health care team may need to admit you to the hospital to treat you. You may require more invasive treatment options, such as a fecal transplant.
- Some people do become reinfected with *C. diff* once they have recovered, and reinfection could happen multiple times. If you become sick after you've recovered, contact your health care team.

Step 6: Provide prevention measures

Next, explain actions the patient can take to keep themselves and those around them healthy.

Suggested script

- Actions you can take include washing your hands with soap and water frequently, especially after using the bathroom and before eating. You should also shower regularly to remove any *C. diff* bacteria on your body.
- Use a separate bathroom if possible. If not, ensure you clean and disinfect high-touched surfaces after each use.
- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces.
- Launder items that have been used by the person with *C. diff* infection.

Step 5: Wrap up and provide fact sheet

Clostridioides difficile Infection

Facts and Tips for Patients and Residents

What is *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*)?

C. diff bacteria cause infections that can give you diarrhea or inflammation of your colon or gut (colitis).

Causes and spread

C. diff infections occur when the bacteria enters the body and reaches the gut.



C. diff bacteria is commonly spread person to person in poop. The bacteria can also be found in your home on surfaces or in the environment where they can live for months or years.

Who is at risk?

Healthy people do not often get infected with *C. diff* even if they do ingest the bacteria. Most *C. diff* infections occur when taking antibiotics or soon after taking antibiotics. This is because antibiotics can disrupt good bacteria that live in our gut, called our microbiome. Our microbiome can protect us from infections, but when it's been affected by antibiotics, we are at greater risk of getting infections, like *C. diff* infection.

Other risk factors include:

- Frequent health care visits, such as a hospital stay or living in a nursing home.
- Being 65 or older.
- Having a weakened immune system.
- Previously having a *C. diff* infection or an exposure to the bacteria.

It's important to know that you can still get *C. diff* infection even if you have none of these risk factors.

Symptoms and complications

Tell your health care team if you have:

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



Some people with *C. diff* infection may experience complications. Common complications include dehydration or colitis. Rare complications can include, a serious gut condition called toxic megacolon, sepsis, or death.

Treatment

C. diff infection can usually be treated by taking specific antibiotics. In some cases, your health care team may admit you to the hospital for treatment.



Reinfection

Some people get *C. diff* infection after recovering. If you have symptoms again, talk with your health care team. People with reoccurring infections may need more innovative treatments.

Prevention

The best prevention method for *C. diff* infection is to take antibiotics only when needed and exactly as prescribed.

If you are infected or caring for someone infected:

- ✓ Wash your hands with soap and water frequently.
- ✓ Use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- ✓ Take regular showers.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect surfaces frequently.
- ✓ Wash laundry items.