Clostridium difficile (C. diff) is a spore-forming bacteria that can exist in the intestines along with various other bacteria. Normally, healthy individuals have enough “healthy” bacteria to keep the C. diff under control. When the C. diff bacteria begin to grow excessively, it can cause persistent diarrhea and, in some cases, inflammation in the colon (usually called Clostridium difficile colitis).

C. diff is likely to affect people who have been in the hospital or other healthcare facilities for a period of time, and have been on antibiotics. They are diagnosed using a stool sample.

**FAQ**  
Frequently Asked Questions and Answers re: C. diff

**What type of infections does C. diff cause?**

C. diff may cause clostridium difficile colitis, which is also known as antibiotic-associated colitis. It is generally found in people who have been on certain antibiotics that can reduce the number of “good” bacteria in the intestines. This reduction in “good” bacteria allows the C. diff to proliferate and become problematic.

C. diff can produce two different, spore-forming toxins which may affect the intestinal wall, causing inflammation and diarrhea. Other symptoms may include fever, nausea, loss of appetite and/or abdominal pain.

A person can have C. diff present in their stool but have no clinical symptoms. A person in this condition would be considered “colonized” rather than infected. According to the CDC, “colonized” people are more common than infected people.

**How is C-diff transmitted?**

C. diff is usually transmitted when a person’s hands come into contact with infected fecal material, and then touch everyday surfaces such as bedrails, mattresses, toilets, phones, remotes, bedside tables, other people, eating utensils, etc.
**C. diff spores** have the ability to survive in the environment when shed from an **infected patient** (organism is present in the body and is causing illness). These spores can survive on surfaces for **weeks or months**. In facilities, private rooms, gloves and gowns are utilized to prevent accidental transmission or to other patients. The Organisms can be killed in the environment with a particular disinfectant spray, called Dispatch, and eliminated from hands with antibacterial soap and water and effective hand-washing technique. **Please note that Cavi-Cide or other bacterocidals are generally not approved to fully eliminate the spores – they generally only kill the organism in its vegetative state, but not in the spore state the way Dispatch can.** ConvaCare Services has the ability to order this product if needed.

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**How do I protect myself from getting C. diff?**

**Surveillance:** As with any communicable disease, first monitor all patients’ diagnoses. If C-diff is indicated, inquire further with the referral source about the status of the infection so standard precautions can be taken. As “hands-on” patient contact is not allowed by non-licensed HCCs or DTs, the risk of direct skin-to-skin exposure is virtually eliminated.

**Practice good hygiene:** The washing of hands is the single most important thing that can be done to prevent the spread of infectious organisms.

**Cover any skin trauma on your person,** such as abrasions or cuts, with a clean dry bandage until healed.

**Avoid contact with/place a barrier between your skin and any surface which may have had contact with a patient’s skin.** We have always recommended use of gloves during the pick-up process. Delivery personnel are **REQUIRED** to glove if there is a risk of exposure to an infectious disease. A mask and/or gown, to prevent contamination of clothing, may also be indicated when dismantling or removing equipment from the home of a patient with a **C. diff** infection, such as a hospital bed mattresses or wheelchairs. Promptly practice “curbside disinfection” by applying Dispatch per manufacturer instruction to ensure effectiveness on C. diff.

**Also per policy, never remove any disposables from a patient/customers’ residence or facility.** This includes hospital bed mattress covers and single patient use alternating pressure pads.

Please direct questions to the Regional Healthcare or Patient Services Manager.

**Sources:**

http://www.cdiffsupport.com/aboutcdiff.html
http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/c-difficile/DS00736
http://www.cdc.gov/hai/organisms/cdiff/cdiff_infect.html#pat