What You Need to Know about *Clostridium difficile* (C.diff) Infection (CDI)

What is *Clostridium difficile*?
*C. difficile* (C. diff) is a germ that lives in the digestive tract (stomach and intestines or bowel). C. diff can make toxins that cause diarrhea.

What are the symptoms of C. diff infection?
- Watery diarrhea
- Belly pain/tenderness
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea

Who is most likely to get C. diff infection?
People who need to use antibiotics and the elderly are most likely to get sick with C. diff. The germs in the stool can spread to surfaces. Surfaces include toilets, handles, bedpans, commode chairs, bedding, and medical equipment. When patients, family members, and health care workers touch these objects, the C. diff gets on their hands or body. If a person ingests (eats) the germ from their unwashed hands, C. diff can cause an infection.

Can C. diff infection be treated?
There are antibiotics that can be used to treat C. diff. In severe cases, a person may need surgery to remove the infected part of the bowel. This surgery is needed in only 1 or 2 out of every 100 persons with C. diff infection.

How do hospitals & clinics prevent the spread of C. diff?
Doctors, nurses, and other health care workers:
- Wash their hands with soap and water before and after they care for each patient.
- Clean rooms and equipment that have been used for patients who have C. diff infections.
- Use enhanced contact precautions to prevent the spread of C. diff from person to person.

What are the safety precautions taken when a C. Diff patient is in the hospital?
- Patients are in private rooms. They stay in their room as much as they can. Patients do not go into common areas. They can go to areas for tests and treatments.
- Health care workers and visitors will wear gowns and gloves when entering patients’ rooms. Nurses will teach you the proper way to put on a gown and gloves.
- Before leaving the room, they remove their gown and gloves. They wash their hands with soap and water.

What can I do to help prevent the spread of C. diff in the health system?
- Doctors, nurses, and other health care workers should clean and wash with soap and water after they care for you.
- Remind visitors to wear a gown and gloves. They should wash their hands with soap and water as they come and go.
- Wash your hands often. Wash after you use the bathroom and before you touch food.
- Do not actively seek antibiotics for common, often viral infections (head cold). Only take antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor.
- Stay in your room except when you need to go for a test or procedure.
- Before leaving your room, put on a clean robe. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Keep the robe on while you are outside your room.
What do I do when I go home?
When you are at home, you can follow your normal routine. There are a few things you should do to decrease the chance of having C. diff infection again and spreading it to others.

- If you are given medicine to treat C. diff, take it as directed.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often. Wash after you go to the bathroom and before you touch food.
- People who live with you should also wash their hands with soap and water often.
- Remind visitors to wash their hands with soap and water as they come and go.
- If you are able, make one bathroom in your house for your use only. Clean the bathroom including light switches, door knobs and faucet handles with a 1:10 bleach solution (1 cup bleach, 9 cups water).
- When you wash objects/clothing that have stool on them, first rinse them in water. Then wash them in hot water with soap. If you are able, add some bleach to the water to help kill the germs. Dry objects on the hottest setting that will not damage them.
- If you begin to have diarrhea, or if your diarrhea gets worse, tell your doctor right away.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7219