



State of New York
Eliot Spitzer, Governor

Department of Health
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C. the DIFFerence Handwashing Can Make



Clostridium difficile (C. diff)

Clostridium difficile (C. diff) is a bacteria that can cause watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, and fever. If not treated, it can lead to more serious problems.

The number of C. diff cases has been growing. The main reason is the more common use of too many antibiotics. Antibiotics kill helpful germs in the intestine. These germs would normally keep C. diff from growing and making you sick. Other medications such as cancer drugs, steroids and indigestion or reflux medication may also allow C. diff. to grow in the intestine. The elderly and individuals with serious illnesses are also at increased risk for the C. diff infection.

C. diff is spread by touching a contaminated surface. It is a very tough germ to kill. In order to live while it passes through the acids in the stomach, C. diff. forms a tough shell (spore). The best way to get rid of C. diff is to wash your hands with soap and water. The friction from rubbing removes the spore.

To avoid spreading C. diff infections, use antibiotics only when needed.

You may also become a C. diff carrier and not realize you can spread the disease. If you develop a watery diarrhea that lasts longer than three days, see your doctor. Your doctor may choose to test you for C. diff and will know which treatment is best. Treatment may include prescribing medication, depending upon how serious the illness. If you are being treated, it is important to take all the medication, even if you are feeling better. If you have been diagnosed with C. diff, do not take over-the-counter medicines for diarrhea, as they can worsen your illness.

