

## *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*), Laundry and Cleaning in the Home

**What is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*)?** *Clostridium difficile* [klo-strid-ee-um dif-uh-seel] (*C. difficile*) is a germ that inflames the colon, known as colitis. People who have illnesses or conditions that need long-term use of antibiotics, and the elderly, are at greater risk of getting this disease. The germs are found in the stool. People can become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with stool and then touch their mouth or mucous membranes. Healthcare workers can spread the germs to patients or on surfaces through hand contact.

### **Symptoms of *C. difficile*:**

- Watery diarrhea (at least three stools per day for two or more days)
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Stomach pain/tenderness

### **Transmission of *C. difficile*:**

*Clostridium difficile* is shed in stool. Any surface, device, or material may serve as a reservoir for the *C. difficile* spores. *C. difficile* spores are transferred to patients mainly by hands of healthcare personnel, patients and families who have touched a contaminated surface or item. *C. difficile* can live for long periods on surfaces.

Antibiotics can be life-saving medicines. Take antibiotics only as prescribed by your doctor. When a person takes antibiotics, good germs that protect against infection are destroyed for several months. During this time, patients can get sick from *C. difficile* picked up from contaminated surfaces or spread from hands of a health care provider, patients or families.

**Alcohol – based hand rubs don't work in destroying the *C. difficile*. Hand-washing is the greatest defense against *Clostridium difficile*. How to wash hands:**

- **Wash hands** with soap and warm water for 30-40 seconds (Sing Happy Birthday 2-3 times)
- Scrub between fingers, and tops of hands
- Rinse with fingers pointed downward
- Use a dry, clean towel to dry both hands
- Use a dry, clean towel to turn off the sink faucets

### **Laundry:**

While combating *C. difficile* at home, it is recommended that soiled linens be handled as little as possible to prevent the spread of *C. difficile* to the person handling the linen. Heavily soiled linens should be laundered separately and not with other linens or clothing. Hot water cycles in home washing machines with chlorine bleach (amount varies with manufacturer and water capacity in each washer) and laundry soap will destroy *C. difficile*.

## Cleaning a Home Environment:

What needs to be cleaned at home using EPA approved germicide for routine cleaning? All hard surfaces, including the bedside commode (if applicable), bed-rails (if applicable), all bathroom sinks, floors, tub/showers, toilets, doorknobs, light switch plates, and shower doors. Frequently touched surfaces including computers kitchen appliances (such as refrigerator handles, oven handles), sinks, counter-tops, floors and any/all medical equipment being utilized (such as walker, wheelchair, IV poles/pumps).

*C. difficile* germs are resistant to many disinfectants, sanitizers and cleaning agents. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is important to ensure that surfaces are cleaned with bleach or another Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved, spore-killing disinfectant. **Clorox Healthcare Bleach Products:** <https://www.cloroxprofessional.com/products/clorox-healthcare-bleach-germicidal-wipes/at-a-glance/>

Clean all items that are shared between individuals (such as glucose meters, thermometers, BP cuffs, stethoscopes). It is best to use disposal wipes, paper towels, or cleaning cloths that can be washed in hot bleach water after cleaning, sponges are not recommended. The dirty cloth should not return to a clean bucket of solution and buckets/containers should be washed and disinfected after each use.

**Always work from the cleanest areas of the home to the dirtiest, cleaning the bathroom last.** All hard surfaces that may be contaminated should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.

## Cleaning Bathrooms:

- **CDC recommends using bleach/water 1:10 ratio: 1 cup of bleach + 9 cups of water made fresh daily.** Mix a fresh solution every 24 hours because the bleach strength decreases over time and may not be effective. **Keep surfaces wet with solution for ten minutes before drying with a clean towel or cloth.**
- Remove fabric shower curtains – replace with a plain plastic/vinyl shower liner that will be able to be cleaned with a bleach product.
- Remove towels hanging on hooks or stacked near the toilet.
- Store toothbrushes, personal grooming items, and towels in a cabinet, linen closet, in zip-lock plastic bags, or under the sink.
- Remove bath mat/rug or launder daily in hot water with bleach added (color fabrics may fade due to bleach – read manufacturer labels prior to laundering).
- Cleaning with paper towels is beneficial
- Wear disposable gloves while cleaning with disinfectants. Change gloves and wash hands if moving from one room to another when cleaning.

## Resources:

C Diff Foundation: <https://cdiffoundation.org/cdiff-infection-homecare/>

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/>