

Clostridium difficile

Definition:

Acute gastroenteritis can be caused by *Clostridium difficile* (*C. diff*) bacteria. The bacteria form toxins and produce spores. Most cases of *C. diff* infection (CDI) occur in persons taking antibiotics. CDI is frequently a healthcare associated infection. It is more common in adults than children.

Signs and symptoms:

The most common symptoms of a *C. diff* infection include: watery diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, and belly pain and tenderness.

Transmission:

C. difficile is found in feces. People can become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with feces and then touch their mouth or mucous membranes. *C. diff* can live for long periods on surfaces. People who have underlying illnesses or conditions requiring prolonged use of antibiotics, and the elderly are at greater risk of getting this disease.

Diagnosis:

C. difficile is diagnosed by laboratory tests.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Provide education to students and staff regarding good hand washing with soap and water (hand sanitizer gel can be used in addition to soap and water, however, should not be used alone)
- Consider cleaning high touch surfaces (such as door knobs, shared computer keyboards, water fountains, toilet handles) more frequently, especially when illness is present
- Use EPA-approved disinfectants when cleaning
<http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>

Treatment Recommendations

- Students with *C. diff* infections should be referred to their primary care provider to make treatment decisions
- Non-specific supportive therapy, including hydration, is important

Exclusions

- Exclude students or staff with diarrhea from school and school trips while symptomatic
- Education modifications may be necessary for students with a positive diagnosis

Reporting Requirements

- School absenteeism greater than 15% should be reported through MEDMS. GI outbreak will be considered if the majority of symptoms are gastroenteritis.
- Track counts of illness each day

Resources:

- Maine CDC HAI website <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/hai/hai-specific.shtml>
- Federal CDC *C. difficile* website http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/cdiff/Cdiff_infect.html
- MEDMS training webinar
http://www.maine.gov/tools/whatsnew/index.php?topic=SLDS_sessions&id=93352&v=Article