

Preventing *Clostridium difficile* in Long-term Care



The bacterium *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) is a major cause of antibiotic-associated diarrhea. The elderly are at highest risk for morbidity and mortality from *C. difficile* infection. Key prevention measures include hand hygiene and judicious antibiotic use. Take the quiz to learn more!

1. The most common infectious cause of diarrhea in elderly, long-term care residents is:
 - a. Rotavirus
 - b. *Salmonella*
 - c. *C. difficile*
 - d. *E. coli*
2. True or False: Any non-essential antibiotics should be stopped in a resident with confirmed *C. difficile* diarrhea.
3. Which of the following antibiotics are most commonly associated with *C. difficile* infection?
 - a. Cephalosporins
 - b. Clindamycin
 - c. Fluoroquinolones
 - d. All of the above
4. Which of the following is an effective way to prevent or contain outbreaks of *C. difficile* infection?
 - a. Judicious use of antibiotics
 - b. Using alcohol-based hand rub instead of soap and water
 - c. Screening for *C. difficile* colonization
5. True or False: A major mode of *C. difficile* transmission is through the hands of healthcare workers.

(Answers on other side.)

Answers:

1. **C.** *C. difficile* is the most common non-epidemic cause of acute diarrhea in long-term care facilities. High rates of antibiotic use contribute to the risk of *C. difficile* infection.
2. **TRUE.** After discontinuing the antibiotic, normal bowel flora can begin to return (this can take as long as 4-6 weeks after stopping the antibiotic). *C. difficile* infection symptoms resolve in 20-25% of people after stopping the use of the “offending antimicrobial.”
3. **D.** Antibiotic exposure is the major risk factor for *C. difficile* infection. More than 90% of all cases occur during or after antibiotic therapy. All antibiotics are implicated but broad-spectrum antibiotics are more likely to cause disease.
4. **A.** Judicious use of antibiotics is one of the most important aspects in preventing *C. difficile* infection. Accurate nursing assessment of a resident’s status is essential to help physicians and nurse practitioners prescribe antibiotics judiciously.
5. **TRUE.** Perform excellent hand hygiene when caring for all residents. Use soap and water instead of alcohol-based hand rubs when caring for residents with *C. difficile* infection; *C. difficile* spores are not killed by alcohol and can last for months in the environment.

Antibiotics are an important weapon in the fight against disease. Help us keep them working. Always let your doctor decide if you need an antibiotic.



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