

## Clostridium Difficile

Clostridium difficile [klo-strid-ee-um dif-uh-seel] (*C. difficile*) is a bacterium that causes inflammation of the colon, known as colitis. People who have other illnesses or conditions requiring prolonged use of antibiotics, and the elderly, are at greater risk of acquiring this disease.

The bacteria are found in the feces. People can become infected if they touch items or surfaces that are contaminated with feces and then touch their mouth or mucous membranes. Healthcare workers can spread the bacteria to patients or contaminate surfaces through hand contact.

Symptoms of *C. difficile* include:

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

The best way to prevent *C. difficile* is to use antibiotics carefully and discontinue them as soon as possible. The spread of *C. difficile* can be prevented through handwashing with soap and water and careful isolation of the person with *C. difficile*. The bacterium is likely to be transmitted in hospitals and other healthcare facilities because patients in the hospitals and other healthcare facilities tend to be on antibiotics, elderly and sick.

Because *C. difficile* spread is preventable, hospitals are required to report the number of total patient days and their incidence of *C. difficile* to the Federal Government. The total patient days and incidence of the infection are used to calculate a Standardized Infection Ratio or SIR.

The graphs below demonstrate Union Hospital's incidence of *C. difficile* as compared to other hospitals in the state and nation. Efforts are ongoing to decrease the incidence of *C. difficile* acquired at Union Hospital. This includes an aggressive campaign to improve hand washing.

