CHILDREN AND C. DIFF INFECTIONS

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

WHAT IS C. DIFF?

Clostridioides difficile, or C. diff, is a **germ that infects the colon,** which can cause severe diarrhea and inflammation. C. diff infections can happen when the balance of the gut microbiome—an ecosystem of microscopic organisms like bacteria, viruses, and fungi—is disrupted.

C. diff is more common and more serious in older adults, but children can get it too. In fact, **20,000 children** in the U.S. are diagnosed with C. diff infections every year.

Symptoms of C. diff include **diarrhea** and **abdominal pain or cramping.** Mucus is often present in the stools. Severe cases can also cause fever, nausea, dehydration, bloody stools, and more.

In **children with C. diff infections,** caregivers might also notice:

- Weight loss
- Changes in mood
- Increased irritability
- Loss of appetite
- Bowel incontinence

MY CHILD HAS THESE SYMPTOMS. IS THERE A CHANCE IT'S NOT C. DIFF?

Yes. C. diff can live in a person's gut without making them sick. This is known as **asymptomatic colonization**, and it means your child could get a false-positive test result. Babies are more likely to carry C. diff without having symptoms. Doctors do not recommend C. diff testing in children under 1 year old until other causes have been ruled out.

If a child is asymptomatically colonized, it doesn't mean they're not sick. It just means that C. diff may not be what is causing their symptoms.

Unfortunately, current tests are not very good at determining if a child has C. diff or is only colonized, so a careful discussion with your doctor is important.

If your child's symptoms continue even with treatment, or if they test negative for C. diff, contact your doctor to explore other possible causes.

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HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD?

TREATMENT AND NUTRITION

Talk with your child's doctor about all possible treatment options to find what may work best. You can support your child's treatment by **adjusting their diet** to ease symptoms and support a healthier gut.

HYGIENE AND CLEANLINESS

Try to have your child use only one bathroom in your home and keep others from using it. If that isn't possible, clean the bathroom regularly with products that contain chlorine bleach.

Teach your child to **wash their hands well** with soap and warm water, after every bathroom visit and before and after meals. Hand sanitizer does not kill C. diff.

C. diff infections require two things: exposure to the germ, and a body that is vulnerable to it. Most people exposed to C. diff will not get sick. However, some groups are at higher risk, like older adults, people with weakened immune systems, and anyone who has taken antibiotics in the past three months.

EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES

Having C. diff can be hard for anyone, including children. Your child may feel upset about missing school, activities, or time with friends, so they may need **extra emotional support.**

Try to **explain their illness** in simple, honest terms. Reassure them about their treatment and keep their daily routine consistent.

Children can return to activities and school when the diarrhea has resolved.

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

As a caregiver, it's important to take care of yourself so you can keep both you and your child safe and healthy. Wash your hands and clean bathroom and kitchen surfaces regularly—and make sure you're **taking care of your own mental health,** not just your child's.

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