What is Clostridium Difficile (C difficile)?
Clostridium difficile is a spore forming bacterium (bug) which has been identified as the likely cause of your diarrhoea. Although in most cases it causes relatively mild illness, occasionally and particularly in elderly patients, it may result in serious illness and even death. The bacteria produces two toxins which are responsible for the diarrhoea and which damage the cells lining the bowel.

We understand that being told that you have an infection and being moved into a side room can cause anxiety to you and your family. We have written this information booklet to help you and your family understand the condition and answer some commonly asked questions. The specialist nurses from the Infection Prevention Team will come and visit you if you would like more information and advice. They will also speak to any members of your family should they have any concerns. If you wish to arrange a visit for you or your family, please ask the nurse in charge of your care to contact us.

What are the symptoms of C difficile infection?
Symptoms of C. difficile infection can include:

- Mild to moderate diarrhoea with a very unpleasant smell
- Stomach cramps and tenderness
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Nausea

How do you know that C. difficile is the likely cause of my diarrhoea?
When your diarrhoea started we sent a sample of your stools to the laboratory for tests. We found substances from this bacterium (bug) in your stools.
**How did I get this particular diarrhoea?**
You may have been carrying this bacterium (bug) long before your diarrhoea started. The healthy bowel contains millions of bacteria (bugs), which can prevent unwanted, possibly harmful bugs such as Clostridium difficile growing. The infection may occur after someone has taken antibiotics to treat another illness. In some cases symptoms can develop up to 10 weeks after finishing a course of antibiotics.

Unfortunately, Clostridium difficile produces substances or toxins, which can irritate the bowel wall causing diarrhoea. Occasionally, this diarrhoea can occur without a history of previous antibiotic or other drug treatment but this is less common.

*C difficile* can also spread from person to person on unwashed hands and as a result of touching surfaces which have become contaminated with spores.

**What treatment is available?**
Sometimes, the diarrhoea may settle by stopping the antibiotic treatment you are currently taking. If the diarrhoea persists the doctor will prescribe a course of different antibiotics that can kill the Clostridium difficile in your bowel. They are usually given for seven to ten days. They can be given in tablet or medicine form or can be in a drip.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids, as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid, frequently. Avoid tea, coffee or carbonated drinks or alcohol. You should dilute sugary drinks even if you would not normally dilute them. A simple pain killer like paracetamol can help combat the pain.

**What can I do to aid my recovery and prevent the spread of C difficile?**
Take antibiotics only when necessary and complete the prescribed course.

**Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:**
- After going to the toilet
- After visiting hospitals and care homes
- Before preparing and eating food
- After handling raw food
Alcohol hand rubs are not effective against *C difficile* so it remains important to wash your hands and the hands of those you care for (or help them wash their hands) with soap and warm water.

Clean all food preparation areas and utensils before and after use. If someone has *C difficile* infection, wash all their dirty clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle possible recommended for the fabric, separately from other laundry. After use, clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins with detergent and hot water.

It is important that you drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. Make sure you take any prescribed treatment.

**Can the diarrhoea come back?**
Yes, sometimes, the diarrhoea may return. If this happens, we need to send another stool sample to the laboratory. If *Clostridium difficile* substances (toxins) are found again, a further course of treatment may be given to you. About one-in-five patients have a recurrence.

**Why do I need to be isolated?**
In hospital there are many susceptible patients who share the same toilet facilities and it is possible that this infection could spread if precautions are not taken. To prevent spread to others we need to move you to a side room with ensuite toilet facilities or commode. Hospital staff who care for you will need to wear gloves and aprons and to wash their hands when leaving your room.

**How do you know when the infection is gone?**
Once your diarrhoea has settled for 48 hours, and you are passing formed stools; you will no longer be infectious. Precautions will no longer be necessary, and you may be moved onto the main ward.

**What about my visitors?**
Visitors are not routinely provided with disposable gloves and aprons unless they are providing hands on care for you. However, if your visitors feel they would like to have disposable gloves and aprons made available for their use, please ask then to speak to the nurse looking after you. If required, a member of the nursing staff will advise you how to put the gloves and aprons on, take them off, and dispose of them correctly.
It is important that all your visitors wash their hands thoroughly on entering your room and again before leaving, using soap and water and ensuring their hands are thoroughly dry using the disposable towels provided. If your visitors need to visit other areas within the healthcare setting it is advisable that they attend these areas first, and then visit you last.

Provided that your visitors follow these precautions, their risk of developing this infection is remote. If they are old or frail, the risk is slightly increased. If you or your visitors are concerned, please ask them to speak to the Infection Prevention Nurse for further advice.

**What about my personal laundry?**

If someone has *C difficile* infection, the ward staff will place dirty linen in an alginate bag that can be placed directly into a domestic washing machine at home. Wash all their dirty clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle possible recommended for the fabric, separately from other laundry. When the washing cycle has finished you can remove the bag and place in the normal waste bin.

**Why are we seeing on-going cases of *C difficile***?

There are large numbers of elderly and unwell people in hospitals who are undergoing course of antibiotic treatment, and new strains of the bacteria are developing that can spread more easily and are capable of causing more disease. The different strains of *C difficile* (called Ribotypes) are number from 001 upwards. One of the strains of *C difficile* is Ribotype 027, which has proved to be easily spread around hospitals and has been associated with an increase in the numbers and disease severity of cases.

**Where can I get more information?**

Any further concerns can be discussed with hospital staff (nurses, medical staff) or a member of the Infection Prevention and Control can come and visit you.

**INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL TEAM**

- **Nevill Hall Hospital** ............................... 01873 732048
- **Royal Gwent Hospital** ............................... 01633 238101/234921
- **Community Hospitals, YAB & YYF** ........ 07903 324603