Clostridium Difficile (C-DIFF)

What is Clostridium Difficile (C-DIFF)

Clostridium Difficile is a spore forming bacterium which presents as one of the normal bacteria in the gut of up to 3% of healthy adults. Clostridium Difficile can cause illness when certain antibiotics disturb the balance of “normal” bacteria in the gut. Its effects can range from:

- nothing in some cases
- diarrhoea of varying severity
- severe inflammation of the bowel

Other symptoms may include:

- fever
- loss of appetite
- nausea, and
- abdominal tenderness

In a small number of cases, patients have died from complicating factors arising from Clostridium Difficile infection.

How does it spread?

- From person to person because those suffering from Clostridium Difficile associated disease, shed spores in their faeces
- Spores can survive for a very long time in the environment and transport themselves via the hands of healthcare personnel who have direct contact with infected patients or with environmental surfaces (floors, bedpans, toilets etc) contaminated with Clostridium Difficile infection
- 80% of cases fall into the over 65 age group as they are most at risk to contract the infection
- People can carry the disease, however, only those hospitalised or on antibiotics can become ill. In order to reduce the chance of spreading the infection to others it is advisable to:
  - wash your hands with soap and water, especially after using the bathroom and before eating
  - clean regularly with household detergent/disinfectors bathroom and kitchen surfaces
Unfortunately, patients with diarrhoea, especially if severe or accompanied by incontinence, may unintentionally spread the infection to other patients, which may lead to outbreaks of Clostridium Difficile in hospitals.

Most cases of Clostridium Difficile diarrhoea make a full recovery. However, elderly patients with other underlying conditions may have a more severe course. Infection in these circumstances may cause a patient’s death.

Can I make a claim?

Anyone affected by Clostridium Difficile has the potential to claim compensation from the Health Authority or Hospital Trust responsible for the provision of medical services at the hospital concerned.

Claimants who have contracted MRSA (another hospital acquired infection) have had some success in bringing claims under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) and there is no reason why these Regulations should not apply to C-diff cases.

If the patient can prove the hospital has failed to follow its infection control policies and that this has resulted in a patient contracting Clostridium Difficile, a hospital may incur liability for any injury caused to the patient as a result.

Clostridium Difficile cases often go further than simply whether or not a patient contracted the infection as a consequence of negligence on the part of the Hospital Trust in the first place. There might, for instance:

- a negligent delay in diagnosis of an infected patient resulting in a delay in giving the patient the treatment which they needed.
- a patient’s management after diagnosis, eg did they receive the right antibiotics and the correct treatment course?

How is it treated?

Two types of antibiotics provide treatment for Clostridium Difficile:

- Metronidazole, and
- Vancomycin

20-30% of patients may suffer a relapse, hence other treatments include:

- pro-biotic (good bacteria) treatments, with the aim of re-establishing the balance of flora in the gut
Compensation claims include:

- pain and suffering
- loss of past and future earnings
- cost of care and assistance
- prescription charges and medical fees
- travelling expenses
- out of pocket expenses

Court proceedings issued) within 3 years of the date of that person’s death.

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- Our specialist Medical Negligence team has recovered millions of pounds in compensation for victims of medical negligence
- We will listen to you carefully and sympathetically and provide you with the very best legal advice

**Costs**

Funding the claim:

- Free consultation
- Legal Aid
- Legal expenses insurance, and
- more often than not on a “no win no fee” basis

We have a Legal Aid Franchise and can make an immediate application for Legal Aid (subject to financial eligibility).

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