What is clostridium difficile? Clostridium difficile (klo-STRID-ee-um dif-us-SEEL) is also called C diff [SEE dif]. C diff bacteria can produce toxins which causes watery stools, or stools with blood and mucous. A person with C diff may also have abdominal cramps, or tenderness and fever. C diff can also cause more serious problems such as pseudomembranous (SU-do-MEM-bra-nus) colitis, in which inflammation causes peeling of the lining of the colon. If this peeling is severe, ulcers of the colon can develop.

Where is C diff found? C diff is often found in soil. Many healthy babies under one year of age have C diff in their intestines, and have no problems. As children get older, C diff is usually replaced by other helpful bacteria.

Why would my child get sick from C diff? Healthy people usually do not get sick from C diff. People who need to take antibiotics for an infection have a risk of getting sick from C diff. A good effect of antibiotics is to kill or slow the growth of bacteria. The bad part of taking antibiotics is that it can change the normal, helpful bacteria in the intestines. This can allow the number of C diff to grow and possibly make toxins.

How will I know if my child has C diff? We will send a sample of your child’s stool to the laboratory. A laboratory test can tell if C diff toxins are present.

Is my child contagious if he has C diff? C diff spreads from person to person. Good hand washing with soap and water for 15 seconds is one key to keep this infection from spreading. Patients who have C diff will be in "Contact Precautions" while they are in the hospital. This means that people who come in your child’s room must wear gowns and gloves. Your child will be in a private room. He will not be able to go to common areas such as playrooms. We will use "Contact Precautions" as long as your child has diarrhea.

Why are hospitals concerned with C diff? Hospitals have many sick patients. Many of the patients are on antibiotics. This increases their risk of getting sick from C diff.

What should I do when my child goes home? C diff usually does not affect healthy people. You do not have to do anything special, except to wash your hands after you touch your child or his stool. If your child is using diapers, your day care may give you special instructions.

What can I do to prevent C diff? The American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend not using antibiotics to treat viruses. They also recommend healthy behaviors such as washing hands with soap and water for 15 seconds. Alcohol hand cleaners do not remove the C diff bacteria.