**Clostridium difficile**

*Clostridium difficile* is a well known health care-associated pathogen. Older adults are disproportionately affected by *Clostridium difficile* infection (CDI). Since 2004 there has been a marked increase in incidence and severity of CDI (mainly overseas) with the emergence of hypervirulent strains. Such strains have now also been identified in Australian healthcare facilities including residential aged care facilities. It is important that medical practitioners are aware of this emerging pathogen so that preventative measures can be put in place.

### Clinical manifestations and risk factors of CDI

Residents can either be colonised with *Clostridium difficile* or can have *Clostridium difficile* infection. Symptoms vary, but suspect CDI if there is severe diarrhoea with abdominal pain, systemic symptoms such as fever, pseudomembranous colitis, toxic megacolon and bowel perforation. Risk factors for infection include older age (especially > 65), exposure to antibiotic therapy, hospitalization, gastric acid suppressants, nasogastric and gastrostomy (PEG) feeding tubes, gastrointestinal surgery or manipulation, and immunosuppression. For treatment advice please refer to the Therapeutic Guidelines, Antibiotic, Version 14.

### What can you do?

If you suspect CDI on clinical grounds in a resident of an aged care facility please ensure that you specifically request faecal specimens to be tested for *Clostridium difficile* and include clinical notes on the referral for the laboratory.

Residents suspected or confirmed to have *Clostridium difficile* infection require additional infection control contact precautions. Infection Control Guidelines for Residential Aged Care facilities are available on the Department's website [www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas).

### Is CDI notifiable?

*Clostridium difficile* is not a notifiable condition in Victoria and as such single cases do not need to be notified to the Department. However, in settings such as residential aged care notifying suspected gastrointestinal illness outbreaks is strongly encouraged. An outbreak is defined as 2 or more residents/staff having onset of vomiting and/or diarrhoea within 72 hours of each other (that cannot be explained by medication or other medical conditions) that makes epidemiological sense.

Outbreaks should be notified by telephone to the Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit, Department of Health on 1300 651 160 between 9am–5pm and 1300 790 733 after hours.