



Kirkland and District Hospital

145 GOVERNMENT ROAD EAST - POSTAL BAG SERVICE 3000
KIRKLAND LAKE, ONTARIO, CANADA
P2N 3P4

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**To: All patients, staff, physicians, volunteers,
visitors, media and general public**

Date: September 26, 2008

Why this communiqué?

Kirkland and District Hospital (KDH) offers this overview to patients and their families, physicians, staff and volunteers, the public, as well as the media. This communiqué is intended to provide insight into how our hospital is working with our staff and the community to manage *C. difficile* on a daily basis, and how comprehensive and concerted all our efforts must continue to be to contain the spread of *C. difficile*.

C. difficile reporting is here

All Ontario Hospitals are required to report the number of *C. difficile* cases in their facilities. This Communiqué will:

- Make it clear what this reporting means for staff and patients;
- give an overview of *C. difficile*;
- outline KDH's commitments; and explain the many actions that KDH is taking to restrict the spread of *C. difficile* in our hospital.

The facts at-a-glance

- On Friday, September 26, the first province-wide, public release of *C. difficile* rates for all Ontario hospitals will occur.
- Hospitals will post their own number of *C. difficile* cases and rates on their own websites. At the same time, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care will post the numbers and rates for all hospitals on a public website.
- KDH believes the reporting of *C. difficile* rates is a beneficial step and is in full support of this initiative.
- Good hand washing by everyone, healthcare staff, physicians, volunteers, patients and visitors, is the single-most effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases like *C. difficile*.

Working Together To Meet YOUR Health Care Needs



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Background

What is *C. difficile*?

***C. difficile* is one of the many types of bacteria that can be found in feces (bowel movement), and has been a known cause of health care-associated diarrhea for about 30 years.**

Where does *C. difficile* come from?

C. difficile is not new. Although people may, lately, associate it with health care settings, it doesn't come from hospitals, long-term care homes or laboratories. It is widely distributed in the environment and can be found in the human intestine, occurring naturally in 3-5% of adults (more commonly in the elderly) without causing symptoms.

What causes *C. difficile*?

C. difficile can be picked up on the hands from exposure in the environment and can get into the stomach once the mouth is touched, or if food is handled and then swallowed. Once in the stomach, the bacteria usually will not cause any problems unless the other bowel bacteria are disturbed, which can happen when antibiotics are taken. **The use of antibiotics increases the chances of developing *C. difficile*** diarrhea as it alters the normal level of good bacteria found in the intestines and colon. Without the presence of the normal bowel bacteria, the *C. difficile* bacteria may start to grow and produce a toxin that can lead to watery diarrhea, fever and abdominal pain or tenderness and even cause severe damage to the bowel.

How does *C. difficile* spread?

When a person has *C. difficile*, the bacteria in their stool can contaminate surfaces such as toilets, bedpans, commode chairs, and door handles (if feces is on hands). Other healthy individuals can contaminate their hands if they touch these items. If these individuals then touch their mouths without washing their hands, they can become infected. *C. difficile* produces spores that survive for long periods and are difficult to kill.

Hand hygiene: everyone's responsibility

Good hand washing by everyone, healthcare staff, physicians, volunteers, patients and visitors, is the single-most effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases like *C. difficile*.

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Kirkland and District Hospital's Commitment:

- The dedicated health professionals who work in this hospital are committed to providing the best possible care to our patients.
- Our hospital strongly supports the provincial government's new public reporting regime because we believe it will inspire improved performance, enhance patient safety, and strengthen the public's confidence in Ontario's hospitals.
- Public reporting of *C. difficile* rates is another, helpful measure to ensure the care provided to our patients is even safer, and improves over time.
- Public reporting of our hospital's *C. difficile* rates will allow us to establish a baseline from which we can then track our rates over time. If we feel our rates have risen above our baseline, we can look internally at our hospital's processes, identify areas for improvement, and implement strategies to reduce the incidence of *C. difficile* in our organization.
- Patients should know that their hospital is safe, that the care you receive here is top-notch, and that every effort is being made to ensure you receive safe, high-quality care.
- KDH has established routine cleaning practices that go beyond the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC) best practices.
- PIDAC best practices have been integrated in our policies and procedures related to surveillance and infectious disease prevention and control at KDH.
- KDH was chosen as one of ten pilot sites by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care as a participant in their Hand Hygiene Pilot Project and has since established a Hand Hygiene Committee to ensure sustainability of this program.
- If we identify a high rate of *C. difficile*, we review our infection prevention and control practices to ensure that they align with the PIDAC best practices documents, as well as the "Just Clean Your Hands" program. In addition, we also review our environmental cleaning practices to ensure that we are

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following the PIDAC best practices documents. We will also consult with our local public health unit to identify any further action that may be required.

- The public reporting of *C. difficile* rates is not intended to serve as a measure for hospitals to compare themselves against other organizations, or for the public to use as a measure of where to seek care. Some hospitals may experience higher rates of *C. difficile* due to their type (i.e. acute care) and patient population (i.e. elderly).
- A high number of *C. difficile* cases in a one-month period does not necessarily mean that a hospital is “unsafe”; a lower number of cases in a one-month period does not necessarily mean that a hospital is “safe”. That is why it is vital that *C. difficile* rates be viewed in the context of other performance indicators.
- For smaller facilities *C. difficile* rates may vary from month to month: the smaller the facility, the greater the rates will vary—this is because a change in even one case in a small facility will cause the rate to go up or down considerably.
- That said, the analysis of our *C. difficile* rates over time will certainly provide us with helpful information that we can use to make quality improvements in our organization.
- We look forward to working with our health professionals to make those improvements in the time ahead.

MORE INFORMATION WILL FOLLOW

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