

What to do when you see diarrhea

Project Firstline

Micro-learn Discussion

Angelina County and Cities Health District

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ANGELINA COUNTY & CITIES
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Team Discussion

What do you usually do when you see diarrhea?

Do you worry you might catch something?

How do you protect yourself and your patients?

When might you call for help or assistance?

Do you have all the tools and information you need to do your job safely?

As a team, how can we help each other take the right infection control actions when we see diarrhea to keep germs from spreading?

Diarrhea

Definition and Causes

- Diarrhea is watery stool which always has germs in it¹.
- Diarrhea can result from many things, and it can be a sign of an infection with a germ that can also make healthy people ill¹.

How Germs That Can Cause Diarrhea Spread.

- Germs that cause diarrhea can spread by direct contact between hands or indirectly by touching equipment, and surfaces that have the germs on them¹.
- Some germs that cause diarrhea can be difficult to kill¹.

Examples of Germs That Cause Diarrhea¹.

- C. difficile
- Norovirus
- Rotavirus
- Due to how easily the germs that cause diarrhea can spread between hands, equipment and surfaces¹ precaution must be taken to prevent diarrhea from spreading in health care facilities¹.

What to do when you see diarrhea

Be careful

Assume that diarrhea has germs that can make you ill even if you are a healthy individual¹.

Treat all diarrheal stool as infectious (having germs that can make you ill) even if you are healthy individual¹.

Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Always use gloves when you are working with a patient who has diarrhea or in their environment¹.

Wear a gown, if necessary, such as when leaning over the patient's bed or when performing tasks that could result in your clothes getting soiled with stool¹.

Hand Hygiene

You need to clean your hands immediately after taking care of a patient that has diarrhea, working in their environment and immediately after taking off your gloves. Hand sanitizer or soap and water may be used for cleaning your hands. You should use soap and water to clean them when they are soiled if you are able to¹.

Germes That Live In The Gut

- The gut is home to germs (bacteria and some yeasts) that are part of our immune system and is needed for us to be healthy².
- Healthy people are not affected by most gut germs².
- Most gut germs can cause infections when they spread².
- Examples of germs that live in the gut are²:
 - E . Coli
 - Klebsiella
 - Candida
 - Clostridiodes Difficile (C. diff)

Reducing Risk

Tasks in healthcare that increase your risk of infection with gut germ².

- Toileting/changing diapers
- Bathing a patient
- Laundry

How to Reduce Your Risk for Infection With Gut Germs (Infection Control Actions)²

- Clean and disinfect your hands after performing tasks involving stool².
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE), (gloves and gowns) when caring for a patient with diarrhea/ performing tasks that are likely to cause stool to get on your hands/clothes and follow your facility's protocol².
- Clean and disinfect affected areas² immediately or as soon as possible.
- Handle soiled linens carefully to contain them and prevent the spread of germs.²
- Follow your facilities waste management² protocol- for handling stool and things contaminated with infectious germs that are difficult to kill.

Key Takeaways

Be

Be cautious. Diarrhea can be caused by an infection, but it is always full of germs.

Use

Use gloves when you're working with the patient and in their environment and clean your hands immediately afterwards.

Know

Know your facilities protocol on what to do if the cause of the diarrhea is not known.

Know

Know where to find cleaning supplies and PPE.

Know

Know additional steps to take if the cause of the diarrhea is known.

References

1. CDC. (2025b, March 26). Diarrhea Micro-Learn. Project Firstline. <https://www.cdc.gov/project-firstline/hcp/training/micro-learn-diarrhea.html>
2. CDC. (2025, March 26). Gut Infographic. Project Firstline. <https://www.cdc.gov/project-firstline/hcp/training/infographic-gut.html>

More information on how to prevent or limit the spread of respiratory infections can be found at the Project Firstline website at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/projectfirstline>

Thank You!