

PRESS INFORMATION



UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL THURSDAY 31 JULY, 16.00 CET

Stockholm, 31 July 2008

ECDC report on *Clostridium difficile* proposes careful review of infection control measures

Existing guidelines for control of *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile*) should be reviewed following recent epidemics in several European countries linked to a new hyper-virulent strain. Although such outbreaks are difficult to control, this may be possible by combining rigorous infection control measures with appropriate use of antibiotics. That was the conclusion of a group of leading European scientists working on behalf of ECDC to analyse existing protocols and make recommendations on infection control measures to limit the spread of *C. difficile*. Though *C. difficile* as such is not a new microbe, the emergence and spread of hyper-virulent new strains, mostly the so-called PCR ribotype 027, have contributed to multiple outbreaks in hospitals and care homes in Europe. These outbreaks have been characterised by patients developing severe diarrhoea, sometimes leading to severe inflammation of the bowel and death. As of June 2008, *C. difficile* PCR ribotype 027 had been reported by healthcare facilities in 16 European countries. Outbreaks were reported in 9 countries including Belgium, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). It was also detected in Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Spain and Sweden, and in Scotland. A summary of the situation across Europe is available in ECDC's scientific journal *Eurosurveillance* (www.eurosurveillance.org).

Zsuzsanna Jakab, ECDC's Director said:

"The report on Infection Control Measures to Limit the Spread of Clostridium difficile was stimulated by the increased incidence of C. difficile in multiple institutions and countries across Europe. ECDC has recognized this emerging new disease and undertaken several actions to inform all EU Member States. ECDC is currently financing a pan-European surveillance study to estimate the incidence of hospital and community acquired C. difficile. The results will be available in 2009".

What are the infection control measures proposed in the report?

The report recommends that all EU Member States should be aware of *C. difficile* in healthcare facilities, and pay particular attention to the PCR ribotype 027. Evidence-

PRESS INFORMATION



based guidelines to prevent the spread of *C. difficile* should combine early diagnosis, surveillance, education of staff, appropriate isolation precautions, hand hygiene, use of protective clothing, environmental cleaning and cleaning of medical equipment, good antibiotic stewardship, and specific measures during outbreaks.

***Clostridium difficile* infections**

Clostridium difficile is a bacterium that is widely distributed in soil and intestinal tracts of animals. Though it is present in the gut of 3% of healthy adults without causing disease, it is the leading cause of diarrhoea in healthcare facilities, mostly in elderly patients and related to the use of antibiotics. The symptoms of *C. difficile* infections range from mild diarrhoea to a severe and life threatening inflammation of the bowel. The transmission of *C. difficile* can be patient-to-patient, via contaminated hands of healthcare workers or by environmental contamination.

Background information on ECDC

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency tasked with identifying assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA/EFTA Member States.

Further information

The full report is available on our website: <http://ecdc.europa.eu>

Link to Eurosurveillance articles on *C. difficile*: www.eurosurveillance.org

Ben Duncan, Spokesman, Tel: +46.761.251566

Sarah Earnshaw, Media Officer, Tel: +46.761.251567

Email: press@ecdc.europa.eu