



## DIARRHEA DANGERS INTENSIFY WITH OVERUSE OF COMMON ANTIBIOTIC

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An unusually virulent strain of a diarrhea-causing bacterium is emerging in both hospital settings and outside the hospital, health experts are warning. *Clostridium difficile* is the leading cause of hospital-acquired infectious diarrhea. The organism can also cause colitis, resulting in colectomies (removal of part of the colon) and even death.

The new outbreaks of the organism appear to be related to the widespread use of a class of antibiotics called fluoroquinolones. This class of antibiotics is widely used for *E. coli*, pneumonia, respiratory, bone and soft tissue infections and anthrax.

Until recently, appearance of *C. difficile*-associated disease (CDAD) was usually confined to the hospital setting. But the Centers for Disease Control reports recent outbreaks of CDAD in our communities.

Dr. L. Clifford McDonald, lead author of a recently-published journal study said, "We're not sure yet, but we have been hearing reports of people who have never been in hospital, or not recently, and even some who have not had antibiotics – people we have thought of as low risk are getting CDAD. We're also trying to sound the alarm on that," added McDonald, a medical epidemiologist with the CDC.

"The major risk factor for getting *C. difficile*-associated disease is having received an antibiotic for some other reason," McDonald said. "They kill the healthy bacteria in the large bowel and, with that, allow the *C. difficile* organism that person has in the intestine to overgrow. The antibiotic knocked out the healthy bacteria that are usually keeping *C. difficile* in check."

One strategy for reducing incidence of the condition is preventing unnecessary use of antibiotics. "We should be doing that anyway," McDonald said. With fluoroquinolones, however, this will be a tall order.

"They are a very important class of antibiotics with a low side-effect profile and they're effective," McDonald added. "They have been attractive therapies, and maybe they have been used more than they should be."

SOURCE: <http://www.healthfinder.gov/news/newsstory.asp?docID=529475>