



PUBLIC NOTICE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Clostridium difficile outbreak - no restrictions for hospital visitors at this time

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Friday, April 20, 2012 – An outbreak of *clostridium difficile* (C. difficile) has been identified on one unit (Restorative Care) at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH).

C. difficile is a bacteria found in the human bowel. It can cause diarrhea and is one of the most common infections in hospitals, health-care facilities and in the broader community. Individuals most at risk include those who have taken antibiotics in the past two months, are older than 65 years of age, and have underlying illnesses and multiple or prolonged hospital stays.

Control measures are in place at NHH to manage the outbreak and prevent transmission. These include:

- **No new admissions to the affected unit** - The Restorative Care Unit is not accepting new admissions and will restrict patient transfers to and from other units for the time being.
- **Strict enforcement of proper hand hygiene** - This remains one of the most important infection prevention and control practices to stop transmission of C. difficile and other infectious diseases.
- **Proactive communication** - NHH has posted outbreak warnings on all hospital entrances as well as to the doorways of the affected and surrounding units, with reminders regarding hand hygiene. A Backgrounder detailing Visitor Tips for Minimizing the Spread of Infections has also been published and is available on www.nhh.ca
- **Contact precautions** - Identified cases are on contact precautions (isolation). Isolated patients must remain in their room except when medically indicated procedures are required. Appropriate use of personal protective equipment, such as gloves and gowns, is required for all who enter the room.
- **Enhanced environmental cleaning** - Increased cleaning of the unit and increased cleaning of equipment shared between patient rooms has been implemented.
- **Monitoring** - Any patient who develops new on-set of diarrhea will be placed on contact precautions pending lab confirmation of C. difficile.

NHH remains fully operational, with programs and services across the hospital unaffected. Visitors are welcome and visiting hours are unchanged with one exception: pet visitations on the Restorative Care Unit will be halted for the duration of the outbreak.

NHH expects all visitors to be diligent in practicing appropriate hand hygiene and infection prevention and control practices when visiting the hospital at any time. Frequent hand washing, particularly before and after patient contact, is mandatory and vital to reducing health care-associated infections.

Updates will be provided as information changes.

Background:

What is c. difficile disease?

C. difficile disease occurs when antibiotics kill good bowel bacteria and allow the C. difficile bacteria to grow. When C. difficile grows, it produces substances (toxins). These toxins can damage the bowel and may cause diarrhea. C. difficile disease is usually mild but sometimes can be severe. In severe cases, surgery may be needed and in extreme cases C. difficile may cause death. C. difficile is the most common cause of infectious diarrhea in hospital.¹

At NHH, rates of hospital-acquired cases of major infections remain consistently low. Many infections are publicly reported, including C. difficile, Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA), VRE, Central Line Infections and Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia. Click here for details: <http://www.nhh.ca/AboutNHH/QualityandSafety.aspx>.

For more information contact Jennifer Gillard at 905-377-7757 or jgillard@nhh.ca.

About Northumberland Hills Hospital – Located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto, Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) delivers a broad range of acute, post-acute, outpatient and diagnostic services. Acute services include emergency and intensive care, medical/surgical care, and obstetrical care. Post-acute specialty services (PASS) include restorative care, rehabilitation and palliative care. Mental health care, chemotherapy, dialysis and 16 other ambulatory care clinics are offered on an outpatient basis through partnerships with regional centres and nearby specialists. NHH offers a full range of diagnostic services, including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) and mammography. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 60,000 residents, west Northumberland comprises the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs approximately 600 people and relies on the additional support provided by physicians and volunteers. NHH is an active member of the Central East Local Health Integration Network. For more information, please visit www.nhh.ca.

¹ Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC), *Routine Practices and Additional Precautions, Annex C - Testing, Surveillance and Management of Clostridium difficile*, May, 2010