

Current situation

The number of new cases of *C. difficile* identified by the Trust and in the community in patients over 65 years old between January and June 2006 has fallen by 33% against the numbers identified in 2005. The number of hospital acquired infections at Stoke Mandeville has fallen by 80% when compared to the first 6 months of last year.

It is worth noting that the vast majority of people – the general public, patients, visitors, and hospital staff – are at very little risk of developing the illness and that the infection can also be found outside of the hospital. Patients who have serious underlying illnesses, have had abdominal surgery or have been taking antibiotics for a long time are at greater risk of infection.

Standard treatment for infected patients involves the use of one of two antibiotics, metronidazole or vancomycin. The vast majority of patients make a full recovery. A leaflet giving more information on *C. difficile* is available from the trust. Please contact Elizabeth Hollman, Patient Safety Manager, on 01494 734850.

Information for patients and relatives who may have been affected

A special helpline, open 9am to 6pm on weekdays, has been set up to take calls from patients or relatives who may have been affected by *C. difficile*. **The helpline number is 01296 31 55 39.**

For more information about the Healthcare Commission report

The full report is available on the Healthcare Commission's website at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk or phone 0845 6013012 to order a hard copy.

For more information about *C. difficile*

Visit the Health Protection Agency's website at www.hpa.org.uk

Final Version: Sunday 23rd July 20.30pm

Buckinghamshire Hospitals 
NHS Trust

Investigation into two outbreaks of *Clostridium difficile* at Stoke Mandeville Hospital by the Healthcare Commission

The trust's summary of the Healthcare Commission's findings

Background to the investigation

Between October 2003 and June 2005 there were two outbreaks of *Clostridium difficile* at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, part of Buckinghamshire Hospitals NHS Trust. During the first outbreak there were 174 new cases and 16 deaths were definitely or probably due to *C. difficile* contracted at Stoke Mandeville. During the second outbreak there were 160 new cases and there were a further 17 deaths from hospital-acquired infection.

The Healthcare Commission has investigated both outbreaks, focusing on the trust's systems and procedures for the control of infection. The investigation was carried out between September 2005 and April 2006 at the request of Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt to 'ensure that best practice on prevention and control of healthcare-acquired infections can be shared at local and national level'.

Summary of the findings

The report concludes that the first outbreak was due to poor practice in the control of infection and insufficient priority being given to infection control by senior managers. The report highlights the following contributing factors:

- the lack of facilities to isolate patients with *C. difficile* or undiagnosed diarrhoea
- a shortage of nurses which meant that staff did not have enough time to apply effective infection control procedures
- the poor state of repair of many of the buildings at Stoke Mandeville which were spread over a large area, the lack of hand washing facilities and antiquated washers and sluices in the hospital at the time
- inadequate staff training on infection control.

The report is particularly critical of senior managers for not acting earlier to control the second outbreak by applying the lessons learned from the first. The board is criticised for focusing on meeting national targets and managing a challenging programme of service changes at the expense of infection control.

Improving infection control – The Trust’s Response

The Healthcare Commission report contains some tough messages. The trust is determined to learn from the report and respond to its recommendations as quickly as possible. To date, standards of cleanliness and hygiene have been dramatically improved throughout the hospital, and a package of infection control measures introduced. The report acknowledges that the trust had ‘learned significant lessons in the management of outbreaks’ and is pleased with the improvements that have already taken place. These include:

- the restricted use of broad spectrum antibiotics such as quinolones
- more frequent cleaning of wards to higher standards, including the introduction of rapid response cleaning teams
- the use of an advanced decontamination system for whole wards
- awareness campaigns for staff and visitors on the importance of washing their hands with soap and hot water to combat the spread of *C. difficile* (and the use of alcohol hand gel for reducing the spread of MRSA)
- the opening of 11 new wards at Stoke Mandeville with vastly improved facilities for isolating patients, including 60 single rooms with en suite bathrooms
- new bathrooms, sluices and hand washing facilities that are easier to clean than those in the prefabricated wards
- spot checks on cleaning throughout the hospital.

Under the new leadership of the acting Chief Executive Alan Bedford, the trust will work closely with the Healthcare Commission and the Health Protection Agency to reduce the risk of infection even further.