



PEGGY LILLIS FOUNDATION

FOR C. DIFF EDUCATION & ADVOCACY

C. DIFF AWARENESS IN AMERICA: 2025 YOUNGOV POLL RESULTS

PRESENTED BY

PEGGY LILLIS FOUNDATION

FOREWORD

By Christian John Lillis



For most people, the death of a parent is a life-changing event. You lose a vital source of support, wisdom, and unconditional love. Even worse is to lose that parent when both of you are relatively young. And worse yet is to lose that parent to a preventable infection of which you were completely unaware. This particular trio of circumstances is shocking, destabilizing, and incredibly painful.

That is how my brother and I lost our mother, Peggy, to a community-acquired *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*) infection in April 2010. She was only 56 years old. I was 36; my brother was 33. Though we were not children, because our mother was so young, we expected to have her in our lives for another two or three decades. As part of my grieving process, I started researching , an infection I first heard of when my mother was diagnosed, just 36 hours before she died.



FOREWORD

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FROM MY RESEARCH, TWO THINGS STOOD OUT. FIRST, THIS INFECTION CLAIMED MORE LIVES IN 2010 (14,000) THAN DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE (10,228) AND NEARLY AS MANY AS AIDS (15,529).

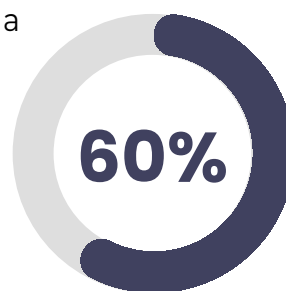
In the next couple of years, CDI deaths would eclipse AIDS. Second, most Americans, particularly those who didn't work in health, had never heard of *C. diff*. No one can protect themselves from an infection they don't know exists.

We wondered, had we known that *C. diff* was a risk factor of Mom's antibiotic use, would we have acted sooner? Might she have lived? I'm sure of the former and confident of the latter.

The year Mom died, about 70 percent of Americans had never heard of *C. diff*. We focused much of our first decade on raising awareness.

In 2021, we commissioned a poll that revealed significant progress, with only 60 percent remaining unaware.

More recently, we commissioned a YouGov poll that showed a further 6 percent increase in awareness of *C. diff* over the past five years. While this is a welcome reflection of our efforts, we remain committed to increasing awareness until *C. diff* is a household term.



THE STORY OF THE PEGGY LILLIS FOUNDATION



FOUNDED IN 2010, THE PEGGY LILLIS FOUNDATION (PLF) IS THE NATION'S LEADING NONPROFIT DEDICATED TO RAISING AWARENESS OF CLOSTRIDIODES DIFFICILE (C. DIFF) INFECTIONS, ADVOCATING FOR PATIENTS, AND ADVANCING PUBLIC HEALTH POLICIES THAT PROTECT COMMUNITIES FROM PREVENTABLE INFECTIONS.

PLF was established by brothers Christian and Liam Lillis after the sudden and tragic death of their mother, Margaret Mary “Peggy” Lillis, from a community-acquired *C. diff* infection she contracted following a routine dental procedure.

A beloved kindergarten teacher, single-mother, and public education advocate in Brooklyn, New York, Peggy's loss illuminated how little the public and healthcare professionals understood about the risks of *C. diff* — a dangerous bacterial infection responsible for nearly 30,000 deaths in the U.S. each year.



What began as a family's effort to honor their mother's memory has evolved into a nationally recognized movement, educating the public, empowering advocates, and shaping policy.



THE STORY OF THE PEGGY LILLIS FOUNDATION



MISSION & VISION

The Peggy Lillis Foundation envisions a world where *C. diff* is **rare, treatable, and survivable**.

Its mission is to build a nationwide awareness movement by educating the public, empowering advocates, and shaping policy to prevent suffering from this often-overlooked infection.

KEY MILESTONES

Since its founding, the Peggy Lillis Foundation has made measurable strides in advancing patient safety and infectious disease awareness, including:

2013

Earned the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's **Excellence in Partnership Award** for leadership in patient advocacy

2022

Established the *C. diff* Peer Support Network, connecting survivors and caregivers to provide emotional support and recovery guidance.

2015
— PRESENT

Hosted **nine national convenings** of *C. diff* advocates, uniting survivors, caregivers, clinicians, and public health leaders to advance education and policy reform

2022
— 2024

Participated in FDA Advisory Committee hearings that contributed to the approval of two new therapies, and convened an official FDA Patient Listening Session to elevate the patient community's unmet needs in *C. diff* care and drug development.

2018

Coordinated the **first-ever *C. diff* Lobby Day on Capitol Hill**, followed by multiple successful Lobby Days and ongoing advocacy for stronger infection reporting and prevention policies

2019

Launched the first annual **"See *C. diff*" Awareness Month** campaign, expanding from a reach of 80,000 people in its first year to more than 23 million in 2023 through social media, earned media placements, and partner collaborations.

2020s

Produced the **first national public service announcement** on *C. diff* infections to raise broad awareness about risk and prevention.

PLF engages in opportunities to advance the importance of *C. diff* research through presentations at major infectious disease conferences like **IDWeek**, **MAD-ID**, and **World AMR Congress** while increasing national visibility and general awareness through media coverage in publications like **USA Today**, **Reuters**, **Forbes** and **STAT News** as well as televised interviews on networks like **CNN**.



METHODOLOGY



This report is based on the findings from a nationwide survey commissioned by the Peggy Lillis Foundation. The goal of the survey was to assess the overall knowledge of *Clostridioides difficile*, or *C. diff*, including causes and risk factors, among adults in the United States. The data collected is also being used to measure the change, if any, between the responses to a similar survey conducted in 2021 by Prodedge.

This survey was conducted by **YouGov**, a well-respected, nonpartisan international research and analytics firm. Responses were collected online in spring 2025 as part of YouGov's **regular omnibus healthcare survey**. The nationally representative sample includes 1,000 U.S. adults ages 19 and older.

Participants were prompted to answer four questions regarding *C. diff*. Three of the questions, which are written below, allowed respondents to select an answer from multiple available choices.

- ↳ How familiar are you with *C. diff* (short for *Clostridioides difficile* infection) and the health issues it causes?
- ↳ How did you learn about *C. diff*?
- ↳ Did you know that antibiotics are the primary cause of CDI?

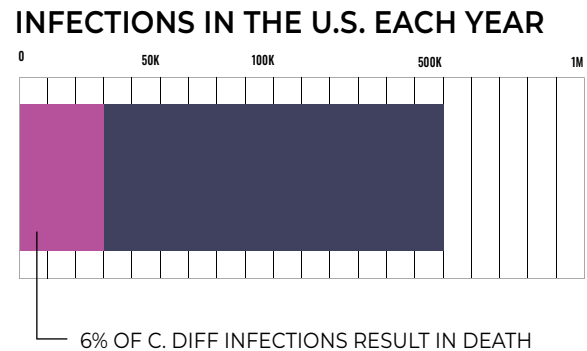
A **fourth question** required participants to state any risk factors they were aware of that can cause *C. diff*.



C. DIFF AWARENESS: BY THE NUMBERS



ACCORDING TO THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, C. DIFF IS ESTIMATED TO CAUSE ABOUT HALF A MILLION INFECTIONS IN THE U.S. EACH YEAR. NEARLY 30,000 RESULT IN DEATH.



The CDC has identified *C. diff* as an urgent public health threat and regularly collects data in order to track rates of incidence and identify trends. Despite this, PLF has found that general knowledge of *C. diff*, its causes, and the dangers of the infection remains low among the general public. Since its inception 15 years ago, the organization has been on a mission to change that.

FAMILIARITY WITH C. DIFF

In this survey, respondents were asked to identify how familiar they were with *C. diff* by selecting one of the following: **very**, **somewhat**, **a little**, or **not at all**. More than half of the participants, '54% chose not at all'. However, the results indicate an overall positive trajectory in the public's awareness of CDI. In the 2021 survey conducted by Prodege, 60% of those surveyed admitted having no knowledge of the infection, representing **a 6% increase in overall public awareness**. Comparatively, the number of respondents who identified being 'somewhat' or 'a little' familiar with *C. diff* increased over the 4-year period, from 14% to 19% and 18% to 19%, respectively.





C. DIFF AWARENESS: BY THE NUMBERS



OF THOSE WHO REPORTED HAVING KNOWLEDGE OF C. DIFF, **18% RECALLED BEING EDUCATED VIA THE MEDIA.** THE AGE GROUP THAT ANSWERED THE QUESTION THE MOST THIS WAY WAS 19 TO 35-YEAR-OLDS, FOLLOWED BY THOSE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 36 AND 50.

Educating the public through the media has been key to PLF's strategy of raising awareness. For the past seven years, the organization has initiated a targeted media campaign during C. *diff* Awareness Month, which falls in November.

EACH YEAR, PLF HAS BEEN ABLE TO REACH MORE THAN **2 MILLION** UNIQUE READERS WITH MEDIA CONTENT AIMED AT EDUCATING, AS WELL AS ADVOCATING FOR THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED C. DIFF.

"[My doctor] ordered a fecal test, and it came back positive for C. diff, something I had never heard of."

- Kee Kee Buckley, New Jersey

News articles have appeared in national publications such as Forbes and SELF as well as health trade outlets like GoodRX, Healio, and Medical News Today, and interviews have appeared on nationally televised programs like the CBS Evening News.



C. DIFF AWARENESS: BY THE NUMBERS



CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS

C. diff can affect anyone, but there are several risk factors that make individuals more likely to develop an infection.

THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF AN INFECTION, ACCORDING TO THE CDC, IS RECENT ANTIBIOTIC USE.

Individuals who are taking or have recently finished taking antibiotics are **10 times as likely to develop CDI** and longer courses increase that risk. Despite more than 45% of respondents having at least some knowledge of *C. diff*, more than three-quarters of them did not identify antibiotic use as a primary cause.



Of those who responded to the survey, about 2% had been diagnosed with a *C. diff* infection at some point in their lives. However, nearly 30% of those individuals did not recognize antibiotic use as the primary cause of CDI.



C. DIFF AWARENESS: BY THE NUMBERS



Another concern is the lack of knowledge regarding the risk factors among healthcare professionals. Just over 6 and a half percent of the survey respondents had experience with *C. diff* due to their role, either previously or currently, as a healthcare professional.

HOWEVER, NEARLY 40% WERE NOT AWARE OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ANTIBIOTIC USE AND C. DIFF RISK.



There are several other risk factors, including

- ↳ Being age 65+
- ↳ A weakened immune system
- ↳ A recent stay in a healthcare setting, like a hospital or nursing home
- ↳ A previous *C. diff* infection

Despite the increased risk for the elderly, awareness among that population is relatively low. 60% of respondents ages 65 and older indicated they were not at all familiar with *C. diff* and the health issues it causes. Only 7% of participants were able to identify the other risk factors in the free-response portion.



IMPACT & LOOKING AHEAD



The results of this nationwide YouGov poll underscore the urgent need to continue expanding public awareness and education around *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*). While there are encouraging signs of progress since the 2021 benchmark survey—particularly in overall name recognition and engagement among younger adults — major knowledge gaps persist across age groups and sectors, including healthcare professionals.

WHERE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

The 2025 YouGov poll results show incremental progress in public awareness of *Clostridioides difficile*. Compared to PLF’s 2021 survey, the percentage of Americans unfamiliar with *C. diff* has decreased by 6%, and more individuals across younger age brackets report learning about the infection through media coverage. PLF’s sustained investment in public education—particularly through its “See *C. diff*” Awareness Month campaign and national media outreach—has played a crucial role in increasing baseline awareness. The rise in earned media coverage and the expanded reach of PLF’s awareness materials demonstrate that these efforts are having a measurable impact.



IMPACT & LOOKING AHEAD



ONGOING GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE

Despite gains in awareness, the survey reveals major gaps in understanding the causes and risk factors of *C. diff*. A large portion of respondents—more than 75%—did not recognize antibiotic use as the leading cause of the infection, and many were unable to name other significant risk factors such as age, recent hospitalization, or weakened immunity.

Even among respondents who reported professional familiarity with *C. diff*—such as those working in healthcare or related fields—nearly 40% failed to identify the antibiotic connection. While these individuals may not be directly involved in diagnosing or treating infections, the data still point to a concerning lack of clarity across sectors where accurate knowledge is essential. This suggests a broader need for targeted education, not only for the public but also for those working in healthcare-related environments, including sanitation, academia, and support services.

These gaps are not evenly distributed. Older adults—those at highest risk for *C. diff*—remain among the least informed, with 60% of those aged 65+ reporting no familiarity with the infection. Targeted education is urgently needed to reach vulnerable populations and reduce disparities in access to life-saving information.

"When I read my test results, I had no idea what *C. diff* even was. I had never heard of it."

- Aspen Bingham, Colorado



IMPACT & LOOKING AHEAD



THE BROADER CONTEXT: A TURNING POINT FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASE AWARENESS

This data arrives as the public health infrastructure faces mounting threats. Proposed federal budget cuts to agencies such as the CDC, NIH, and BARDA jeopardize the very programs that support *C. diff* surveillance, antimicrobial resistance research, and access to new treatments. In June 2025, PLF convened a national webinar to examine these threats and mobilize support for preserving essential funding. The poll data reinforces the importance of these efforts—not only for *C. diff*, but for all preventable infectious diseases that rely on strong public health systems and scientific research.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PLF'S WORK AHEAD

PLF is using these findings to shape its next phase of advocacy and education efforts. The Foundation's upcoming priorities include:

- **Expanding The “See *C. Diff*” Campaign** To Reach New Communities, Age Groups, And Media Platforms.
- **Deepening partnerships with health systems and clinical organizations** to improve provider education and encourage responsible antibiotic stewardship.
- **Pushing for sustained or increased federal funding** for infectious disease prevention, drug development, and patient-centered care.
- **Mobilizing advocates** to share personal stories and elevate awareness through local and national platforms.
- **Expanding the reach of PLF's Peer Support Network** and patient storytelling campaigns to foster deeper engagement and peer-to-peer learning for both the public and healthcare professionals.

