



WHAT IS A SURGICAL SITE INFECTION (SSI)?

A surgical site infection is an infection that occurs after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery took place. Most patients who have surgery do not develop an infection. Some of the common symptoms of a surgical site infection are:

- Redness and pain around the area where you had surgery
- Drainage of cloudy fluid from your surgical wound
- Fever

CAN SSI'S BE TREATED?

Yes. Most surgical site infections can be treated with antibiotics. The antibiotic given to you depends on the bacteria (germs) causing the infection. Sometimes patients with SSIs also need another surgery to treat the infection.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT SSIs?

To prevent SSI's doctors, nurses and other health care providers:

- Clean their hands and arms up to the elbows with an antiseptic agent just before the surgery.
- Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for each patient.
- May remove hair immediately before your surgery using electric clippers (not a razor) if the hair is in the same area where the procedure will occur.
- Wear special hair covers, masks, gowns, and gloves during surgery to keep the surgery area clean.
- Give you antibiotics before your surgery starts. In most cases, you should get antibiotics within 60 minutes before the surgery starts and the antibiotics should be stopped within 24 hours after surgery.
- Clean the skin at the site of your surgery with a special soap that kills germs.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP PREVENT AN SSI?

- Tell your doctor about other medical problems you may have. Health problems such as allergies, diabetes and obesity could affect your surgery and your treatment.
- Quit smoking. Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your doctor about how you can quit before your surgery.
- Do not shave near the area where you will have surgery. Shaving with a razor can irritate the skin and make it easier to develop an infection.
- Take a shower or bath with an antibacterial soap, such as Dial or Hibiclens. Do this either the night before or morning of surgery or as directed by your surgeon.

After Your Surgery:

- Make sure that your health care providers clean their hands before examining you either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. If you do not see your health care providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.
- Family and friends who visit you should not touch the surgical wound or dressings.
- Family and friends should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after visiting you. If you do not see them clean their hands, ask them to clean their hands.



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Preventing Infections After Surgery

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN YOU GO HOME?

- *Before you go home, your doctor or nurse will explain everything you need to know about taking care of your wound. Make sure you understand how to care for your wound before you leave the hospital.*
- *Always clean your hands before and after caring for your wound.*
- *If you have any symptoms of an infection, such as redness and pain at the surgery site, drainage, or fever, call your doctor immediately.*
- *If you have additional questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.*

Adapted from the CDC's: "FAQs (frequently asked questions) about 'Surgical Site Infections.'"

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse. You also may contact DHR Health's Department of Infection Prevention and Control at (956) 362-7850.