



Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAIs)

Frequently Asked Questions About Surgical Site Infections

What is a Surgical Site Infection?

A surgical site infection (SSI) is an infection that occurs after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery took place. Surgical site infections can sometimes be superficial infections involving the skin only. Other surgical site infections are more serious and can involve tissues under the skin, organs, or implanted material.

Symptoms include:

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

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

What are some of the things that hospitals are doing to prevent SSIs?

To prevent SSIs, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers should follow CDC infection prevention guidelines including:

- Clean their hands and arms up to their 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.
 - If indicated, remove some of your hair immediately before your surgery using electric clippers 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.
 - When indicated, 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.
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What can I do to help prevent SSIs?

Before surgery:

- 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 where you will have surgery. Shaving with a razor can irritate your skin and make it easier to develop an infection.

At the time of surgery:

- Speak up if someone tries to shave you with a razor before surgery. Ask why you need to be shaved and talk with your surgeon if you have any concerns.

After surgery:

- If you do not see your 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.
- 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.
- Make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.
- If you have any symptoms of an infection, such as redness and pain at the surgery site, drainage, or fever, call your doctor immediately.

Additional Information

- [Guideline for the Prevention of Surgical Site Infection, 2017](#) 