

FAQs

(frequently asked questions)

about “Surgical Site Infections”

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. However, infections develop in about 1 to 3 out of every 100 patients who have surgery.

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

To prevent SSIs, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers:

- 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.
- May 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. They should not shave you with a razor.
- 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 I do to help prevent SSIs?

Before your 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 your 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.
- Ask if you will get antibiotics before surgery.

After your surgery:

- Make sure that your healthcare providers clean their hands before examining you, either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

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.

What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

- Before you go home, your doctor or nurse should 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.
- Before you go home, 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.

If you have additional questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

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FAQs

(frequently asked questions)

about "MRSA"

(Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus (pronounced staff-ill-oh-KOK-us AW-ree-us), or "Staph" is a very common germ that about 1 out of every 3 people have on their skin or in their nose. This germ does not cause any problems for most people who have it on their skin. But sometimes it can cause serious infections such as skin or wound infections, pneumonia, or infections of the blood.

Antibiotics are given to kill Staph germs when they cause infections. Some Staph are resistant, meaning they cannot be killed by some antibiotics. "Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*" or "MRSA" is a type of Staph that is resistant to some of the antibiotics that are often used to treat Staph infections.

Who is most likely to get an MRSA infection?

In the hospital, people who are more likely to get an MRSA infection are people who:

- have other health conditions making them sick
- have been in the hospital or a nursing home
- have been treated with antibiotics.

People who are healthy and who have not been in the hospital or a nursing home can also get MRSA infections. These infections usually involve the skin. More information about this type of MRSA infection, known as "community-associated MRSA" infection, is available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa>

How do I get an MRSA infection?

People who have MRSA germs on their skin or who are infected with MRSA may be able to spread the germ to other people. MRSA can be passed on to bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, and medical equipment. It can spread to other people on contaminated equipment and on the hands of doctors, nurses, other healthcare providers and visitors.

Can MRSA infections be treated?

Yes, there are antibiotics that can kill MRSA germs. Some patients with MRSA abscesses may need surgery to drain the infection. Your healthcare provider will determine which treatments are best for you.

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

To prevent MRSA infections, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers:

- **Clean their hands** with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for every patient.
- Carefully **clean hospital rooms and medical equipment**.
- Use **Contact Precautions** when caring for patients with MRSA. Contact Precautions mean:
 - o Whenever possible, patients with MRSA will have a single room or will share a room only with someone else who also has MRSA.
 - o Healthcare providers will put on gloves and wear a gown over their clothing while taking care of patients with MRSA.

- o Visitors may also be asked to wear a gown and gloves.
- o When leaving the room, hospital providers and visitors remove their gown and gloves and clean their hands.
- o Patients on Contact Precautions are asked to stay in their hospital rooms as much as possible. They should not go to common areas, such as the gift shop or cafeteria. They may go to other areas of the hospital for treatments and tests.

- **May test** some patients to see if they have MRSA on their skin. This test involves rubbing a cotton-tipped swab in the patient's nostrils or on the skin.

What can I do to help prevent MRSA infections?

In the hospital

- Make sure that all doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for you.

If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

When you go home

- If you have wounds or an intravascular device (such as a catheter or dialysis port) make sure that you know how to take care of them.

Can my friends and family get MRSA when they visit me?

The chance of getting MRSA while visiting a person who has MRSA is very low. To decrease the chance of getting MRSA your family and friends should:

- Clean their hands before they enter your room and when they leave.
- Ask a healthcare provider if they need to wear protective gowns and gloves when they visit you.

What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

To prevent another MRSA infection and to prevent spreading MRSA to others:

- Keep taking any antibiotics prescribed by your doctor. Don't take half-doses or stop before you complete your prescribed course.
- Clean your hands often, especially before and after changing your wound dressing or bandage.
- People who live with you should clean their hands often as well.
- Keep any wounds clean and change bandages as instructed until healed.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.
- Wash and dry your clothes and bed linens in the warmest temperatures recommended on the labels.
- Tell your healthcare providers that you have MRSA. This includes home health nurses and aides, therapists, and personnel in doctors' offices.
- Your doctor may have more instructions for you.

If you have questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

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