

Surgical Site Infections (SSIs)

(Wound Infection after Surgery)

What are surgical site infections or SSIs?

A Surgical Site Infection (SSI) is an infection of a wound from surgery. Most infections are caused by germs (bacteria) found on and in the body. Germs are everywhere. They can be found on the skin, in the air, and on surfaces. Fortunately, only 2 out of 100 patients who have surgery, get a surgery wound infection.

What are the symptoms?

- Pain or tenderness.
- Redness around the wound or a red streak coming from it.
- Swelling or hardness around the wound.
- Green, yellow or bad-smelling fluid (pus, drainage) from the wound.
- Fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher.
- A tired feeling that doesn't go away.

Symptoms can come at any time- hours to even weeks after surgery. **Call your child's healthcare provider if you think there is an infection.**

Who has a greater chance of getting an infection?

Patients who:

- Have a weakened immune system.
- Have serious health problems such as diabetes, heart or kidney problems.
- Smoke.
- Have nutrition problems or do not eat enough healthy foods.
- Are over or under weight.

How are the infections treated?

Treatment depends on where the wound is and what type of germ is causing the infection. A small amount of wound drainage may be sent to the lab to see what germs are in the wound. Most infections are treated with antibiotics.

What can you do to help prevent an infection?

- Keep the wound site clean and dry.
- Always wash your hands before and after caring for your child.
- Remind others to wash their hands before and after visiting.
- Let others know that if they are sick they should not be visiting your child.
- If antibiotics are ordered make sure to give them until they are all gone.

What is done in the hospital to prevent SSIs?

- Healthcare providers should wash their hands with soap or an alcohol-based cleaner before and after touching your child. If you do not see them wash their hands, please ask them to do so.

Before surgery:

- All operating room (OR) staff's arms and hands are scrubbed carefully with germ killing soap.
- Your child's skin is cleaned where the surgery is done with a germ killing liquid.
- Hair is clipped rather than shaved if it needs to be removed from your child's skin. This prevents tiny nicks and cuts that can be a place where germs can enter the body.
- Antibiotics are given before some surgeries. Your child's doctor will decide if antibiotics are needed for your child.

During surgery:

- Your child will be kept warm during surgery. Getting too cold during surgery is one risk factor that can lead to an SSI.
- To keep your child warm:
 - Warm IV fluids are given.
 - The temperature is raised in the OR.
 - Warm blankets are used.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has:

- Symptoms of an infection such as fever, redness, swelling, increasing pain or green or yellow drainage.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.