

Surgical site (operation wound) infection

Information for patients

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

The leaflet tells you about surgical site (operation wound) infections, how we reduce the risk of you developing such an infection and how you can help.

What is a surgical site infection?

There are lots of germs on our skin and around us. Most of them are harmless, but a few can cause infections. Our skin protects us from these harmful germs.

A surgical site infection develops when germs from your skin or around you enter the incision (cut) made through your skin to carry out your operation. They are very rare and usually only affect the skin but can sometimes spread to deeper tissue.

Infections are more likely to develop after surgery on parts of the body that have lots of germs, such as the bowel.

When do surgical site infections develop?

A surgical site infection can develop anytime from 2 -3 days after operation, up to when the wound has healed (usually 2 – 3 weeks after the operation).

Sometimes an infection can happen quite a few months after an operation, mostly when an artificial implant has been used, for example, a hip replacement.

What increases the risk of a surgical site infection?

You are more likely to develop a wound infection if you:

- are a diabetic
- are a smoker
- take steroids
- are poorly nourished (have a poor diet)
- have been in hospital for a long time before your operation
- have had a blood transfusion before your operation.

What can be done to reduce the risk of a surgical site infection?

To help reduce this risk:

- if your skin needs to be shaved before an operation, staff should use electric clippers with a disposable head. **Do not** try to shave the area yourself

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- you may be prescribed antibiotics before the operation to further reduce the risk of developing an infection
- your skin will be cleaned with an antiseptic solution in the operating theatre before the incision is made
- we use sterile instruments and staff wear sterile gowns and gloves during your operation
- your wound will be covered with a dressing which should be left in place for at least 48 hours
- staff will clean their hands before touching your wound, either by using hand rub or by washing with soap and water.

What can I do to help?

You should:

- have a bath or shower on the day of your operation, if possible, to make sure your skin is clean ¹
- **not** touch your wound. If you do need to touch the wound you should wash your hands beforehand
- tell the nurse who is caring for you if you are worried about your wound.

How would I know if I had a wound infection?

You should watch for any of the following symptoms:

- the skin around your wound becoming red, swollen, hot or painful
- your wound having a green or yellow coloured discharge (pus)
- feeling generally unwell or feverish or you have a temperature above 38°C (100.4°F).

What should I do if I have any of these symptoms at home?

These symptoms could be a sign you have a wound infection. You should contact your GP, the Out of Hours Service or NHS Choices for advice. (See contact numbers).

What happens if I develop a wound infection?

Your nurse or doctor may take a swab from the surface of your wound and send it to a laboratory for testing. You may be given treatment with antibiotics.

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Contact numbers

If you have any worries or concerns you should contact your GP during normal surgery hours. Outside surgery hours, you should contact your GP's surgery for the Out of Hours Service number.

If you need further advice, or have any problems you can talk to an infection prevention and control nurse.

North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust

Infection prevention and control nurse

telephone: 01642 383280

Monday – Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm

NHS Choices

telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)

Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones

or via the website at www.nhs.uk

Reference

1. Surgical Site Infection: prevention and treatment. Clinical Guideline (CG74) February 2017. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)

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This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk

Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we're doing well or if there's anything which we can improve, that's why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

telephone: 01642 624719

Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm

Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

freephone: 0800 092 0084

Mobile: (can use text): 0779 506 1883

Email: patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

telephone: 01642 617617

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm. The office is based on the ground floor at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

telephone: 01642 833551 or email: information.governance@nth.nhs.uk

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