



A patient's guide to

Preventing surgical site infections



FACTS

- **Wounds can get infected** by germs from the skin or the environment during or after surgery
- To reduce the risk of infection **patients should wash their hair and skin** in the bath or shower before an operation. They should also tell staff beforehand if they have an infection
- Do not remove hair / shave prior to surgery
- Patients who are known to have had, carry, or be at risk of **infections such as MRSA** will need to be tested (screened) again before coming in for their operation
- **If you are found to have MRSA** you will be asked to have a course of treatment before your operation
- **Antibiotic medicines are given to some patients** to prevent infections starting after surgery
- All **wounds are checked regularly** while in hospital for signs of infection
- Staff and patients need to be aware of the importance of **washing hands and keeping the wound clean**
- **At RNOH we take special precautions** in operating theatres and in patient care to reduce the chance of wound infections.

Surgical wounds

Most operations involve making cuts (wounds) in the skin. Most wounds heal without causing problems, but a wound can become contaminated by germs (bacteria) from the skin or environment and get into the body; this can cause an infection.

When do surgical wound infections develop?

A wound infection can appear at any time from 2-3 days to 2-3 weeks after the operation, until the wound has healed. Infection can develop after you leave the hospital, and very occasionally an infection can occur several months after the operation.

Signs of a wound infection include:

- redness, swelling and heat around the wound;
- the wound becoming more painful to touch;
- green or yellow pus coming from the wound, which may be smelly;
- you feel generally unwell or feverish, or have a raised temperature.

If the infection is left untreated, it spreads deeper into the body or into the blood stream and additional symptoms will develop to include a fever and feeling very unwell. You must seek medical advice if you suspect you have a wound infection.

How will your wound be monitored?

During your stay in hospital, the nurse will change your wound dressing in line with The hospital protocol and also regularly check for any signs of Infection.

If you are concerned about your wound tell the nurse who is looking after you. Infection can develop after you leave hospital. You may have an infection if you develop one or more of the symptoms mentioned on page 3.

If you have problems with your wound after discharge, contact your general practitioner (GP) unless you have been told to contact the hospital.

What you can do to prevent infection?

Before your operation

- **If you have an infection before your operation**, even if it's only a cold or sore throat, tell the hospital immediately
- **You should wash your hair and take a bath or shower** as usual at home before coming in for day surgery or if already in hospital, the morning of your operation
- You should eat a healthy balanced diet and keep warm before and after surgery as this is important for wound healing
- Do not remove hair on the operation area before surgery unless this is agreed with your surgeon.

After your operation

- **If you are given antibiotics**, make sure that you take the whole course as instructed
- If any staff come to look at or change your wound dressing, it is crucial that **they wash their hands** before and after touching it. Please ask them if you have not seen them wash their hands
- **Do not touch your wound** or dressing unless you have washed your hands first
- **Tell the ward staff** if you notice anywhere on the ward or in the toilets that has not been cleaned properly
- Rest and sleep are important to wound healing.

What we are doing at RNOH?

- Our operating theatres and equipment are always cleaned to the highest standards
- Cleaning procedures, for staff and equipment, are obeyed for every operation
- Before an operation starts, the skin area is cleaned and sterile sheets are used to protect the operating area
- The air and environment in the operating area are constantly checked for germs
- Where necessary, patients are given antibiotics before, during or after surgery to prevent infection developing
- Every patient is nursed with care to try and avoid infection getting into the wound or any other area, such as a catheter or drain (where a tube is used to drain a wound of excess fluid)
- You will be given warming blankets if necessary prior to surgery to keep you warm, as warmth, rest and good diet are essential to wound healing.



Visitors

- **Please check with the nursing staff** before you visit how many people are allowed to visit at one time and whether children are permitted.
- **Please do not come in to visit if you have an infection**, including a cold or other minor infection. If you are not sure you should check with the nursing staff first.
- **Every visitor should wash their hands** or use the bedside alcohol gel before and after visiting.

About one month of your operation the hospital may send you a questionnaire or telephone you to ask if you have any problems with your wound. Some patients leave hospital shortly after their operation and hospital staff need to find out about wound infections that occur after patients leave the hospital.

For further information

Please contact:

The Infection Prevention and Control Team
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If you would like this leaflet translated into another language/large print, please contact the Quality Team on 020 8909 5439.

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