



Monitoring Surgical Wounds for Infection

This leaflet explains what a surgical wound infection is and our programme for monitoring those infections acquired in hospitals. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse that is caring for you.

What is a Surgical Wound Infection?

There are many germs that live in and on our bodies and also in the environment. Most are harmless, and some are even useful. Our bodies have natural defences against germs that can cause harm. Our skin is an example of this, as it normally prevents germs from entering our bodies. However, if there is any break in the skin such as the incision (cut) to the skin, this can allow germs to enter and cause an infection.



Signs and symptoms of a surgical wound infection

An infection can develop when you leave hospital. Some redness and swelling after surgery is to be expected. However, you may have an infection if you develop one or more of the following symptoms:

- The skin around your wound gets red or sore and you do not think it is part of the normal wound healing process, or it feels hot and swollen
- Your wound has a green or yellow coloured discharge (pus)
- You feel generally unwell or feverish, or you have a temperature

When do these infections develop?

A surgical wound infection can develop at any time from 2-3 days after surgery until the wound has healed (usually 2-3 weeks after the operation). Occasionally an infection can occur several months after an operation. Most surgical wound infections are limited to the skin, but occasionally may develop deeper into tissues.



Image: example of a blood stained dressing breaching the border

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

Should you develop any possible signs of infection or you have a blood stained dressing which is breaching the border, please contact our wound care helpline on **0121 685 4354***. We are experts in orthopaedic surgery and wound care and would rather you phone and ask for advice about your wound. If the nurse or doctor suspects that you have a surgical wound infection, they may take a sample from the surface of your wound with a swab and send it to the laboratory for further testing. Your doctor may also prescribe treatment with antibiotics.

*If you are a patient from the Queen Elizabeth hospital, please call **0121 371 2000**.

*If you are a patient from Heartlands, Solihull or Good Hope hospital, please call **0121 424 2000**.

What increases the risk of a surgical site infection?



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The risk of developing a surgical wound infection depends on many factors such as:

- Your age and sex
- Your general medical condition before the operation
- Type of operation
- How long the operation has lasted

How will my wound be monitored?

During your stay in hospital, the nurse looking after you will check your wound dressing for any signs of infection. If you are concerned about your wound tell the nurse who is looking after you.

It is important that you do not remove your dressing, or touch your wound or wound drain, as you can accidentally transfer germs from your fingers to your wound.

Surgical Site Infection Surveillance Service (SSISS)

What is the aim of Surgical Site Infection Surveillance?

The aim of SSISS is to enhance the quality of patient care by encouraging hospitals to use data obtained from surveillance to compare their rates of SSI over time and against a benchmark rate, and to use this information to review and guide clinical practice.

What happens to the information?

Public Health England (PHE) collects information from over 300 NHS and private hospitals in England that are taking part in the national programme. The information is used to calculate rates of surgical wound infection for different types of operations. Hospitals can then compare their rates to national rates and decide where they may need to make improvements to ensure their patients are given the highest possible standard of care.

PHE treats all patient information as strictly confidential. No data which could be used to identify individuals are published.

Where can I gain further information?

PHE is an organisation that is dedicated to protecting people's health. It provides impartial and authoritative information on health protection issues to the public, to professionals and to the government. Further information regarding surgical site infections is available via the PHE website:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/surgical-site-infections-ssi-guidance-data-and-analysis

What input is required from the patient?

When you reach your 30th day post-surgery, you will receive a wound healing questionnaire in the post. It is really important that you answer the questionnaire and send it back to us. This will help us to obtain and input accurate and effective data to PHE.

Please call our wound care helpline, **0121 685 4354** if you have any concerns with your wound.