

# 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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### Patient Preoperative Surgery Showering Instructions

The use of Chlorhexidine Gluconate (CHG) 4%, skin cleanser has been shown to **DECREASE** bacteria (germ) levels on the skin and may reduce your risk of a surgical site infection.

1. It is recommended to shower the night before surgery and the morning of surgery.
2. Shower with a skin cleanser containing 4% Chlorhexidine Gluconate (CHG). Some brand names of CHG skin cleansers are Betasept or Hibiclens. CHG may be purchased from most pharmacies. A doctor's prescription is not necessary. **(Do not use a CHG containing soap on children 2 years of age or less, on the face, eyes, ears, mouth, genital area, on open wounds or if allergic to CHG).** If unable to use CHG, shower with antibacterial soap.
3. Refer to label or package insert for complete manufacturer's instructions.
4. Wash and rinse your hair with your regular hair products if desired (optional).
5. Wash and rinse your face and then genitals (privates) using your **regular soap** product.
6. Wet your entire body and step away from the shower stream.
7. Wet a clean washcloth and apply CHG skin cleanser to the cloth.
8. Clean your entire body from the neck down. Pay special attention to the area where you will have surgery as well as the belly button, hands, and feet.
9. Ask someone for help if you are unable to wash certain areas of your body.
10. Rinse well and gently dry with a freshly laundered clean towel.
11. After your shower, do not use any powder, deodorant, perfumes or lotions prior to surgery.
12. Wear freshly laundered pajamas to bed the night before surgery and sleep on freshly laundered sheets.
13. Wear freshly laundered clothes to the hospital.
14. Do not shave near where you are having surgery. (Shaving with a razor can increase your risk of infection where you have surgery)

