



Patient Fact Sheet – Preventing Surgical Site Infections

Surgical site infections can be prevented if care is taken before, during and after surgery.

This fact sheet provides you with tips to help prevent a surgical site infection. If you have additional questions, please ask your health care provider.

What is a surgical site infection (SSI)?

A surgical site infection occurs when harmful bacteria (germs) enter the body through the surgical site (any cut the surgeon makes in the skin to perform the surgery). Most clients who have surgery do not develop an infection. However, infections can develop in about 1% to 3% of clients who have surgery.

What are the risk factors for an SSI?

The risk of developing an SSI is higher if you:

- Are an older adult
- Have a weakened immune system or other serious health problems such as diabetes
- Are malnourished
- Are overweight
- Smoke
- Already have a skin infection somewhere on your body

What are the signs and symptoms of an SSI?

- Redness, heat, and/or swelling around the surgical site
- Pus from the surgical site
- Increased pain or tenderness at the surgical site
- Chills/fever with a temperature greater than 38° Celsius

If you experience any of these symptoms, present to the nearest healthcare facility for assessment

Take the *Surgical Site Infection Report Form* with you to your follow-up appointment

What will health care workers do to prevent SSIs?

- May give you antibiotics before your surgery starts
- If necessary, remove hair around your surgical site with clippers - they should not shave you with a razor
- Wear special hair covers, masks, gowns, and gloves during surgery to keep the surgery area clean
- Clean the skin at your surgical site with a special soap that kills bacteria (germs)
- Keep you warm during surgery
- Monitor your glucose (sugar) levels during and after surgery if you have diabetes



- Clean their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for you

What can you do to prevent an SSI?

Before your surgery:

- Tell your surgeon if any skin infection, rash or sores develop before your surgery.
- Do not shave or wax near the surgical site for one week before your surgery. This can irritate your skin and make it easier to develop an infection.
- If you have diabetes, ensure your blood glucose (sugar) levels are controlled 48 hours before and after your surgery.
- Stop smoking at least 24 hours before your surgery.
- Take a bath or shower before your surgery according to the directions given by your health care provider.

After discharge from the hospital:

- Ask your health care provider to explain everything you need to know about taking care of your surgical site. **Ask for clarification if you are unsure or don't remember.**
- Make sure you know **who to contact and what number to call**, if you have any questions or problems after your get home. If you are unsure or don't remember, call Health Links at 1-888-315-9257 and they will further assist you.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after caring for your surgical site.
- Avoid tight clothing that may rub and irritate your surgical site.
- Do not allow visitors to touch your surgical site.
- Pets may be comforting, but may also be curious about your surgical site. Do not allow your pet to lick or touch your surgical site.
- **Take the Surgical Site Infection Report Form with you to your follow-up appointment.**

Adapted from *Surgical Site Infection (SSI) Surveillance Protocol: Saskatchewan*. Saskatchewan Infection Prevention and Control Program.