

The Safe Patient

An educational patient safety series with free downloadable brochures, a service of The Patient Channel, Safe Care Campaign, AVA and APIC in cooperation with the CDC

Staying Safe: Preventing Bloodstream Infections

While in the hospital, you may need to receive blood, fluids or medications through a tube that is placed into a large vein, such as in the neck, chest, arm, or groin. That tube, called **a central line or a central catheter** may provide a potential entry for bacteria. Bloodstream infections occur when bacteria get into the blood through the catheter tubing and circulate throughout the body.

If you develop **fever or chills it may be a bloodstream infection** caused by an infection around the IV site. Also **if the skin around the catheter becomes sore and red, talk to your health care provider immediately.** To help lower the risk of infection, **make sure that everyone entering and leaving your room washes or sanitizes their hands. If you do not see them doing it, insist that they do so. Also, don't let friends and family touch the catheter or tubing.**

The most important thing to do, for the patients and visitors at the bedside, is to **make sure that every single person who touches you washes their hands. Caregivers need to wash their hands before they touch your IV catheter and before they insert a medication into your catheter. You and your visitors should speak up, and not be afraid to ask people to wash their hands.**

Let hospital personnel know immediately if the bandage covering the catheter comes off or becomes wet or dirty. Also you should ask your health professional everyday if your catheter is still needed. **If you have a catheter in, you should be very comfortable asking your doctor or your nurse everyday, "Is it time for this to come out yet? Tomorrow?" And then remind them again the next day,** because the sooner it comes out, the better chance you have of actively preventing a potential bloodstream infection. Catheter-Associated Bloodstream infections are serious, but knowing how to prevent them can help keep you infection free.

