

The Safe Patient

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

Staying Safe: Preventing Surgical Site Infections

While in the hospital, you are vulnerable to developing an infection, especially if you've had an operation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 500,000 patients every year develop a Surgical Site Infection. Surgery is not a normal event. Surgery is a situation where we are literally cutting through a lot of the protective barriers of the human body in order to fix a problem or save a life.

- To reduce the chances of an infection, the surgical team performs an elaborate scrubbing process to help make their hands as sterile as possible but an infection can still happen. **If after an operation you experience a fever, redness or pain around the area that was operated on, or see cloudy fluid draining from the surgical wound, let your health care provider know.** There are things that you can do to help prevent infection. **Ask your doctor if you need antibiotics ahead of time, and if he/she says "yes", and you didn't think you received them, say, "Wasn't I supposed to get a pre-incisional antibiotic?"**
- Other precautions: When you're being prepped for the operation, **ask for a blanket or a warmer.** Keeping your body warm can help to prevent infection. And if there's hair to be removed from the site to be operated on ... **ask that it be clipped rather than shaved** so no microscopic nicks in the skin can invite a potential infection.
- **Most importantly, make sure that anyone who comes in contact with you and your surgical wound, health care providers, hospital staff, family and friends, wash or sanitize their hands.**

