

Newsletter Article IPC Topic-Surgical Site Infections

A surgical site infection is an infection that occurs after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery took place.⁴ Surgical site infections can sometimes be superficial infections involving the skin only. Other surgical site infections are more serious and can involve tissues under the skin, organs, or implanted material.⁴

Let's discuss what the risk to the patient and healthcare workers. Germs live normally on a patient's skin and normally do not cause harm. During a surgical procedure a break in the skin creates a pathway for germs to spread. Healthcare workers spread germs through unclean hands. Cleaning your hands, source control (covering wounds and cuts), proper glove usage, and patient education can help prevent surgical site infections.

Now that we have discussed the risk, let's talk about the signs and symptoms of a surgical site infection. Symptoms of a surgical site infection include⁴ Redness and pain around the area where you had surgery, drainage of cloudy fluid from your surgical wound or fever.⁴

There are several ways health care workers can educate patients on surgical site infections. Education is to be done under a healthcare providers guidance or in consultation with a health care provider^{3,4,5}.

- Bathing/showering should be done prior to surgery with soap and water to lower the bacteria on the skin. Inquire with your healthcare provider if any special soap is necessary prior to surgery. Pre-operative bathing needs to occur. Depending on your facility, clean linens will be placed.
- 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.
- Underlying health issues like diabetes, allergies, or obesity may need to be discussed further due to an increased risk of infection.
- Smoking, vaping, or using smokeless tobacco should be stopped prior to surgery. Smoking and use of nicotine prevents healing due to lack of oxygen to tissues.

Are you interested in sharing Surgical Site Infection information with your staff? Our Project Firstline team has quick and simple training resources available on vaccination and sharp safety as well as other IPC training topics. Contact us at dohpfl@nd.gov to get training resources you can use today!

For more information on recognizing risk for Surgical Site Infections and related Project Firstline materials, see References below:

1. [Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings | CDC](#)
2. [Germs lives on the skin \(cdc.gov\)](#)
3. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guideline for the Prevention of Surgical Site Infection, 2017 - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
4. [Surgical Site Infection \(SSI\) | HAI | CDC](#) Guidelines for Perioperative Practices. AORN. 2023 Edition <https://content.yudu.com/web/1zk04/0A29evv/GuidePerPrac23/html/htmlArticles/i>

[ndex.html?origin=reader&page=1&article=/00_cover1.html](#) *available with subscription only.

5. [Print Materials and Job Aids from Project Firstline | Infection Control | CDC](#)
6. [Germs can live in blood \(cdc.gov\)](#)
7. [Germs live in “the gut” \(cdc.gov\)](#)
8. [Germs live in “the gut” \(cdc.gov\)](#)
9. [Germs can live on devices \(cdc.gov\)](#)
10. [Germs live in water and on wet surfaces \(cdc.gov\)](#)