

Family Birth Center at Maine Medical Center

Preventing Surgical Site Infections Following Cesarean Section

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 one to three 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 SSI's 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 SSI's need another surgery to treat the infection.

What are hospitals doing to prevent SSI's?

To prevent SSI's, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers:

- Clean their hands and arms up to the elbows with an antiseptic agent just before 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 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 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. The inside of your vagina will also be cleaned with special soap.

What can I do to prevent SSI's after my C-section?

Before your surgery:

- Do not shave near where you will have surgery (bikini line) for at least five days before surgery. Shaving with a razor can irritate your skin and make it easier to get an infection.

- Shower and wash the area the night before surgery. Your doctor may provide you with Hibiclens soap, which you can use to clean your skin in the shower.
- Tell your doctor about other medical problems you may have. Health problems such as allergies, diabetes, and obesity could affect your surgery and treatment.
- Quit smoking. Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your doctor about how you can quit before your surgery.

At the time of your surgery:

- You may be given warming blankets and warmed IV fluids before surgery to increase blood flow.
- You will receive antibiotics before surgery starts.
- 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.

After your surgery:

- Your bladder catheter should be removed within eight hours after surgery.
- Your dressing should be removed 24-48 hours after surgery, or on post-operative day two.
- Make sure that healthcare providers, friends, and family clean their hands with soap or alcohol-based hand rub before and after visiting you.
- Family and friends who visit you should not touch the surgical wound or dressings.

What about 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 know how to care for your wound before you leave the hospital.
- Always clean your hands before and after caring for your wound.
- Shower as you normally would, but gently wash the incision with soap or Hibiclens.
- You may have steri-strips (strips of tape) across the incision. As these fall off after surgery, you may remove them if it is easy to do so. Otherwise, your doctor will remove them in the office at your follow-up visit.
- Before you go home, make sure you know whom to contact if you have questions or problems.
- 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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