

# Surgical site infections: prevention and treatment

Information for the public

Published: 11 April 2019

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

## Preventing surgical site infections

Many tiny organisms, including bacteria and viruses, live on our skin, in our bodies and all around us without causing us any harm. When you have surgery, some of these organisms can get into the cut made by the surgeon and cause an infection. This is called a surgical site infection (or a surgical wound infection). Most surgical site infections are not serious, but some can be more serious if they affect the deeper tissues under the skin. Having a surgical site infection can mean a longer stay in hospital to recover, but there are things that can be done before, during and after your surgery that can help to avoid infection.

We want this guideline to help prevent surgical site infections by making sure your care team:

- takes the right precautions at every stage to reduce the risk of infection, for example to prepare you for surgery and to dress and clean your wound
- knows when, and how, to use antiseptics and antibiotics to reduce the risk of infection, and tells you afterwards if you have been given antibiotics during surgery
- gives you advice on washing before surgery and shows you how to care for your wound properly when you go home.

## Working together

Your care team should give you clear information about the chance of getting a surgical site infection and explain the care they will take to reduce it. They should answer your questions and listen carefully to your views and concerns. They should also:

- give you practical advice, like when you can shower after your surgery
- explain how to spot signs of an infection when you go home
- make sure you know who to contact if you're worried about your wound
- tell you what will happen if you do get an infection.

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

## Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website](#) has more information about having an operation. A patient information leaflet on [monitoring surgical wounds for infection](#) is available from Public Health England.

The organisation below can give you more advice and support.

- [MRSA Action UK](#)

NICE is not responsible for the content of this website.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by surgical site infection and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-3395-2