

# Preventing a surgical site infection

It is rare, but a surgical site infection may occur after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery took place. Surgical site infections can be superficial, meaning they involve the skin only. Other surgical site infections are more serious, and can involve tissues under the skin, organs, or the implant.

**Nothing is more important to us than your safety and well-being.**

## **What does Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center do to prevent infections?**

- Before the day of your procedure, we'll call to ask you a few questions about your health and review your medication list. During this call, we will also share instructions on how to best prepare for your procedure.
- If recommended by your healthcare provider, we will give you an antibiotic immediately before your procedure.
- We will clean your surgical site with a special soap that kills germs. We may also ask you to do the same the night before and morning of your procedure.
- We will provide a clean and safe environment.
- We will thoroughly wash our hands before and after we touch you.
- We wear special hair covers, masks, gowns, and gloves during surgery to protect you.
- We will check your blood sugar before your surgical procedure, and depending on the level, we will start an insulin drip to decrease blood sugar. Temporarily controlling blood sugar during and after surgery may decrease the risk of infection. Please know receiving insulin during surgery does not cause a person to become diabetic.
- We also monitor and maintain your temperature as another way to reduce your risk for infection.

## **What can you do to help prevent infections?**

- Tell your nurse and doctor about other medical conditions you may have, such as allergies and diabetes, which could affect your surgery and treatment.
- Don't smoke. If you smoke, please refrain for at least four hours before your procedure. Your doctor can also suggest tips for helping you quit before your scheduled surgery.
- Shower the night before, and the morning of your procedure or surgery using instructions noted below.
- Do not shave any part of your body in the 24 hours before your procedure or surgery. Shaving causes small breaks in the skin where germs can enter.
- Avoid scrubbing your skin too hard.
- Pat down with a clean towel to dry.
- Do not use any powders, deodorants, lotions, creams, or makeup the day of your procedure or surgery.
- Dress in freshly washed clothes.

## **Following your procedure or surgery**

- If you are staying in the hospital overnight, insist that each of your healthcare providers wash their hands before and after they examine you. If you do not see them using the alcohol hand sanitizer, or soap and water, please ask them to do so.
- Family and friends should also clean their hands before and after visiting with you. If you don't see them using the alcohol hand sanitizer, or soap and water, please ask them to do so.

*See reverse for more information*

## Before you go home

- Before you are discharged, make sure your nurse and doctor have thoroughly explained to you and your loved one how to properly care for your wound, and who to contact if you have any questions, concerns, or problems.
- Always clean your hands before you care for your wound.
- If you have any symptoms of an infection, including redness, pain, fever, and / or green, yellow or foul-smelling drainage, please call your doctor immediately.

## Hand hygiene

- The most important thing you can do to prevent an infection is to wash your hands. It's the number one way we can prevent infections to ourselves and to other people.
- When you're out in public, remember to protect yourself by cleaning your hands before you eat.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are as good if not better than soap and water if your hands are not soiled. If your hands have something on them, you'll want to wash them thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- Your skin is your first line of defense from infections.

## Special bathing instructions when using Chlorhexidine Gluconate

- If you are instructed to bathe with special soap before surgery, please read all instructions first and follow them closely. Bathing with an antiseptic before surgery reduces the number of germs on the skin.
- Do not use chlorhexidine gluconate if you are known to be allergic to it.
- Use half of a four-ounce bottle of two percent chlorhexidine gluconate the night before, and the other half for your morning shower. Only use this product from the neck down to your toes. Do not get it into your eyes -- if you do, flush your eyes with copious amounts of water.

*Resources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Association for Professionals in Infection and Epidemiology; Guide to Infection Prevention in Outpatient Settings*

**For more information, please contact:**

Northern Light Surgical Navigation 207.973.5456