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Surgical Site Infection Basics

KEY POINTS

- A surgical site infection (SSI) is an infection in the part of the body where a surgery took place.
- SSIs can generally be treated with antibiotics but may require additional medical care.
- There are ways to reduce your risk of contracting an SSI.

Overview

A surgical site infection (SSI) is a type of [healthcare-associated infection](#) (HAI). It is an infection that occurs in the part of the body where a surgery took place.

Types

SSIs can occur in:

- Skin
- Tissue
- Organs
- Implanted material, like a hip replacement

Signs and symptoms

- Redness and pain around the area where you had surgery.
- Cloudy fluid draining from your surgical wound.
- Fever.
- Other signs and symptoms may also occur.

Reducing risk

Before surgery:

- Tell your healthcare provider about other medical problems you may have. Health problems such as allergies, diabetes and obesity could affect your surgery and your treatment.
- Quit smoking. Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your healthcare provider about how you can quit before your surgery.
- 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.

At the time of surgery:

- Speak up if someone tries to shave you with a razor in the area where you will have surgery. Ask why you need to be shaved in the area and talk with your surgeon if you have any concerns.

After surgery:

- If you do not see your healthcare provider clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

- Family and friends should not touch the surgical wound or dressings.
- Family and friends should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after visiting you. If you do not see them clean their hands, ask them to clean their hands.
- Always [clean your hands](#) before and after caring for your wound.

Before you leave the hospital:

- Make sure you understand how to care for your wound.
- Make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems.

Once you are home:

- If you have any symptoms of an infection, such as redness and pain at the surgery site, drainage, or fever, call your healthcare provider immediately.

Healthcare providers should always follow [Core Infection Control Practices](#) and [SSI Prevention Guidelines](#) to reduce the risk of spreading germs to patients.

Treatment and recovery

Treatment generally includes antibiotics, but the type of treatment depends on the germ causing the infection. Sometimes, patients need another surgery to treat SSIs.

What CDC is doing

- Working closely with [health departments](#), other federal agencies, healthcare providers and patients to SSIs.
- Tracking SSIs through the [National Healthcare Safety Network](#).
 - Data is also available on the [AR & Patient Safety Portal](#).

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
[National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases \(NCEZID\)](#)