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# Surgical Wound Infection Infection Control



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## Further Information

We endeavor to provide an excellent service at all times, but should you have any concerns please, in the first instance, raise these with the Clinical Nurse Lead, Senior Nurse or Manager on duty.

If they cannot resolve your concern, please contact our Patient Experience Team on 01932 723553 or email [asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net](mailto:asp-tr.patient.advice@nhs.net). If you remain concerned, the team can also advise upon how to make a formal complaint.

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## **Surgical Wound Infection**

### **WHAT IS SURGICAL WOUND INFECTION?**

There are lots of micro-organisms (germs) on our skin and in the environment around us. Most of them are harmless, some are beneficial, and a very small proportion can cause harm. Our skin protects us from germs that can cause harm.

A surgical wound infection occurs when germs from the skin or the environment enter the incision (cut) that the surgeon makes through your skin in order to carry out the operation.

### **WHEN DO SURGICAL WOUND INFECTIONS DEVELOP AND HOW COMMON ARE THEY?**

A surgical wound infection can develop at any time from two to three days after surgery until the wound has healed (usually two to three weeks after the operation). Very occasionally, an infection can occur several months after an operation.

Surgical wound infections are uncommon. Most surgical wound infections are limited to the skin, but can spread occasionally to deeper tissues.

Infections are more likely to occur after surgery on parts of the body that harbour lots of germs, such as the gut.

## HOW WILL I KNOW IF I HAVE A SURGICAL WOUND INFECTION?

During your stay in hospital, the nurse who changes your wound dressings will check for any signs of infection. If you are concerned about your wound, tell the nurse who is looking after you.

**Don't** be tempted to remove your dressing, touch your wound or wound drain. You could accidentally transfer germs from your fingers to your wound.

After you leave hospital, you may develop one or more of the symptoms listed below:

- the skin round your wound gets red or sore, or it feels hot and swollen;
- your wound has a coloured discharge (pus);
- you feel generally unwell or feverish, or you have a temperature.

These symptoms could indicate that you have a wound infection. You should tell your GP who will decide if you require treatment.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF I DEVELOP A SURGICAL WOUND INFECTION?

If the nurse or doctor suspects that you have a surgical wound infection, they may take a sample from the surface of your wound with a swab and send it to the laboratory for tests. Your nurse or doctor may prescribe treatment with antibiotics. The nurse and/or doctor will discuss this with you.

## WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT INFECTIONS IN HOSPITAL?

Public Health England (previously known as the Health Protection Agency) publishes information each year on surgical wound infections. The latest information and figures are available on the website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england)

The Public Health England website has a section on healthcare associated infections. This includes a factsheet on the mandatory surveillance of orthopaedic surgical wound infections and a protocol for the surveillance of surgical site infections: <https://www.gov.uk/topic/health-protection/infectious-diseases>