

6. Any further information

If you have any further questions please feel free to speak to:

- Your doctor, nurse or the ward manager
- The infection prevention & control team, on 0207 288 3261

Public Health England website also provides additional information

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.



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**Infection Prevention &
Control**

**Preventing surgical
wound infections**

A patient's guide



Preventing surgical wound infections at Whittington Health

1. What is a surgical wound infection?

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

There are lots of micro-organisms (bacteria) 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 bacteria that can cause harm.

2. How common are they?

A surgical wound infection can develop at any time from two 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 bacteria, such as the gut.

3. 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 have a short stay your GP / district nurse/ midwife may check your wound.

If you are concerned about your wound, tell the person who is looking after you. Once you leave hospital, observe your wound in the event one or more of the symptoms listed below develops:

- The skin round your wound gets red or sore, or it feels hot and swollen
- Your wound has a green or yellow discharge (pus)
- You feel generally unwell or feverish, or you have a temperature

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

4. What happens if I develop a surgical wound infection?

If a healthcare worker / GP suspect 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.

You may be prescribed antibiotics as treatment by your doctor or midwife.

5. What can you do to help prevent wound infections?

Practice good basic hygiene – this will help prevent wound infections.

You will have an MRSA screen in the days or weeks prior to surgery. This involves a (swab) cotton bud rolled inside your nose and another swab of the groin area. The swabs are then tested for the presence of MRSA (Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus). If you are found to have the bacteria you will require a special wash with an antibacterial soap and nose cream for 5 days before surgery. This will reduce the risk of these bacteria causing a wound infection.

Prior to surgery:

- Shower or have a bath using soap, the morning of or night before surgery.

Post-surgery:

- Your dressing should remain undisturbed for at least three days (you could accidentally transfer bacteria from your fingers to your wound).

Wound Surveillance:

- You may be asked to fill out a post discharge questionnaire about your wound 28 days after your surgery.

The staff at The Whittington hospital should wash their hands regularly and use alcohol hand rub, which you will see widely available. Staff receive hand hygiene refresher training regularly.