What is a central line?

A **central line** (also called a central catheter) is a tube that is placed into a large vein, usually in the neck, chest, arm, or groin. The central line is often used to give necessary fluids or medications to help you get better. It may be left in place for several weeks.

What is central line-associated bloodstream infection (or catheter-associated bloodstream infection)?

A bloodstream infection can occur when bacteria or other germs travel down a central line and enter the blood.

If you develop a central line-associated bloodstream infection you may become ill with fevers and chills or the skin around the central line may become sore and red.
Is it possible to treat a central line-associated bloodstream infection?

Yes, central line-associated bloodstream infection is serious, but often can be successfully treated with antibiotics. The central line might need to be removed if you develop an infection.

What are some of the things Michigan Medicine is doing to prevent central line-associated bloodstream infections?

To prevent central line-associated bloodstream infections doctors and nurses do the following:

**If you need a central line inserted:**
- A vein is chosen where the central line can be safely inserted and where the risk for infection is small.
- Staff take the following steps before inserting the central line to keep it sterile:
  - Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub
  - Wear a mask, cap, sterile (germ-free) gown, and sterile gloves when putting in the central line
  - Clean your skin with an antiseptic (germ-killing) cleanser
- A sterile sheet is used to cover you while the catheter is being put in.

**If you have a central line in place:**
- Before using the central line to give medications or draw blood staff do the following:
  - Clean their hands
  - Wear gloves
  - Clean the central line opening with an antiseptic solution
- When changing the bandage that covers the skin where the central line enters, staff clean their hands and wear gloves.
- Staff decide every day if you still need to have the central line. The central line is removed as soon as it is no longer needed.
Will my Central line be used to collect blood for tests that my doctor orders?

- To reduce the risk of infection, it is best practice to limit the number of times your central line is accessed while you are in the hospital. This means that if you need blood collected for a test, it may be collected by drawing from your arm and not through your central line, unless specifically requested by your doctor.

What can I do to help prevent a central line-associated bloodstream infection?

- Ask your doctors and nurses to explain why you need the central line and how long you will have it.
- Ask your doctors and nurses if they will be using all the prevention methods discussed above.
- Make sure that all doctors and nurses caring for you clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for you.

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

- If the bandage comes off or becomes wet or dirty, tell your nurse or doctor immediately.
- Inform your nurse or doctor if the area around your central line is sore or red.
- Do not let family and friends who visit touch the central line or the tubing.
- Make sure family and friends clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after visiting you.
What do I need to do when I go home from the hospital?

Some people leave the hospital with a central line in order to continue their treatment. If you go home with a central line, your doctors and nurses will explain everything you need to know about taking care of your central line. Before you go home, make sure that you:

- Understand how to care for the central line. For example, ask for instructions on showering or bathing with the central line and how to change the central line dressing.
- Know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.

When caring for your central line make sure you:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before handling your central line.
- Watch for the signs and symptoms of central line-associated bloodstream infection, such as soreness or redness at the central line insertion site, or fever. Call your healthcare provider immediately if any occur.

If you have questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.