

# What Can Patients and Families Do to Prevent Infections from Surgery?

## Be part of our care team:

Preventing infections from surgery is an important responsibility for you, your health care team, and your family.

## What happens if I get an infection from surgery?

- You may have to stay in the hospital for a longer time. Some infections require you to stay in the hospital for an additional 6 weeks.
- You may have to experience additional invasive or painful treatments and procedures. This may include the placement of new IV catheters, frequent blood draws, wound care or surgery.
- You may become very ill and require blood pressure and breathing support. A severe infection can cause organ damage or may possibly lead to death.
- The infection may spread to other vulnerable patients. Some patients are more likely to get infections, and others do not respond to infection treatment as well as others.

Take action and avoid infections from surgery using the pre- and post-operative checklist below:

## Before surgery



- For all family members: begin practicing proper handwashing. If you need more instruction on proper handwashing techniques, contact someone from your health care team.



- Do not shave or use hair removal products** around the surgical site for at least 3 days before surgery. Shaving and hair removal products can irritate the skin and could lead to infection.



- Keep your and your child's nails clean**, trimmed and free of polish or artificial nail products. These may carry germs and increase infection risk.
  - Packing a pair of clean socks or mittens to cover hands may be helpful for infants.



- Quit smoking.** Patients who smoke get more infections. Talk to your doctor about how you can quit before your surgery.
  - For all family members: limit exposing the patient to second-hand smoke. If clothes smell of smoke, change or make sure to cover clothes with a blanket before seeing the patient. Second hand smoke exposure causes many health problems or infections in infants and children.



- Begin decolonization** as instructed by your care team.

### Day before surgery



- For all family members: continue practicing proper handwashing.



- Wash** any special linens, toys, clothes, car seats, pacifiers or other comfort items that you will be bringing to the hospital or using when you are discharged home. Please limit the number of these items to reduce risk of infection.



- In the evening, you should **shower or bathe with a liquid or new bar of antibacterial soap** such as Dial, Hibiclens, or the soap provided to you at your clinic visit.



- Wash your hair with any shampoo and dry off with a clean towel.
- Do not apply** any deodorant, lotions, creams, powders, makeup or perfume to your skin.



- Dress in clean clothes** and sleep with clean linens on your bed.

## Day of surgery



- For all family members: continue practicing proper handwashing by washing your hands before entering the patient's room and before touching the patient or any patient items.



- If you did not shower the night before or are visibly dirty, **shower or bathe with a liquid or new bar of antibacterial soap** such as Dial, Hibiclens, or the soap provided to you at your clinic visit.



- Do not apply** any deodorant, lotions, creams, powders, makeup or perfume to your skin.



- Dress in freshly laundered, loose fitting clothes.**



- Brush your teeth** and rinse your mouth making sure not to swallow any of the toothpaste. Brushing your teeth reduces your chances of pneumonia after surgery.
  - For younger children, have them brush without toothpaste.



- Limit visitor contact** on the day of surgery to avoid exposure to new germs and bacteria, especially after bathing.
- The number of visitors will be limited in the pre-operative area for patient safety.

## After surgery



- For all family members: continue practicing proper handwashing by washing hands before entering patient's room and before touching the patient or any patient items.
- Wash hands** before and immediately after toileting and diaper changes. Change dirty linen and clothes as soon as possible.



- Keep your incision clean and dry.** Always wash hands before and after changing dressings, changing clothes or touching the incision.



- Do not take a bath or submerge your incision in water** (such as in a pools, lakes, sprinklers or hot tubs) until cleared by your doctor. Ask your healthcare team about when it is safe to start showering.



- Wear clean clothes.**
  - Infants and children should wear a shirt, bib or onesie to prevent drool and spit-ups from getting on the incision.



- Keep pets away from your incision.** Wash hands after petting or caring for your pet.



- Keep toys, blankets, stuffed animals and pacifiers clean.



- After discharge, make sure your home environment is kept as clean as possible.

**Ask your care team about other specific instructions related to your surgery.**

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Icons created by macrovector via freepik.com, Takeform.net, [Freepik] from www.flaticon.com

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 07/2019