

Safest
Together

Surgical Site Infections

The importance of preventing surgical site infections

Surgical site infections (SSIs) are infections that occur after surgery in the part of the body where the surgery took place. Some SSIs can be superficial involving only the skin, while others can be more serious and may involve deep tissue, organs, or implanted material.

An SSI can lead to a longer recovery and/or readmission to the hospital. The patient can experience symptoms of pain, fever, or swelling. While most SSIs can be treated with antibiotics, additional surgery or procedures may sometimes be required to treat the SSI.

Procedures that have been associated with higher SSI rates in children include cardiothoracic, neurosurgical ventricular shunt, and spinal fusion surgeries. For this reason, the Safest Together program will be monitoring these three types of procedures.

What we are doing

In Alberta, best safety practices are part of routine care. A team of staff and physicians is developing additional resources and guidelines to further help prevent SSIs from occurring. Materials are being developed for patients and their families to be part of the SSI prevention effort. Additionally, staff will begin to track how successful we are in consistently following the best safety practices.

Prevention methods and detection strategies, either already in place or being introduced, include:

- ensuring a preoperative bath has been taken the night before and/or morning of surgery
- avoiding the use of razors
- administering antibiotics prior to incision and following up with appropriate redosing
- using alcohol-based antiseptic when appropriate

Results

We are in the process of measuring our baseline rate of SSIs, measured in terms of incidents per 100 procedures. Once we have established our baseline, we will be tracking the rates on a monthly basis.

Our current goal is to decrease the rate of SSIs by 40 per cent by June 30th, 2019.

▶ To learn more, visit [ahs.ca/SafestTogether](https://www.ahs.ca/SafestTogether)

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