Monitoring Surgical wounds for Infection

What is surgical wound infection?
There are lots of micro-organisms (germs) on our skin and the environment around us. Most are harmless, some are beneficial but a small proportion of them actually cause us harm. Our skin provides a barrier and protects us from harmful germs.

A surgical wound infection occurs when germs from our skin and the environment enter the incision that the surgeon makes through the skin in order to carry out the operation.

When do surgical wound infections develop?
A surgical wound infection can develop at anytime after surgery until the wound has healed. Wound healing may take up to 2-3 weeks after surgery. Sometimes an infection can occur several months after an operation and up to twelve months if you have an artificial device such as a stimulator inserted.

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

What happens if I develop a surgical wound infection?
If a doctor or nurse suspects that you may have a wound infection, they may take a sample from the surface of your wound with a swab and send it to the laboratory for testing. You may be prescribed a course of antibiotics if necessary.

How can the Walton Centre help to prevent Surgical Wound infections?
- Please make sure that you have a shower using Octenisan body wash the night before and the morning of your surgery including washing your hair.
- Whilst in hospital do not be tempted to remove your dressing or touch your wound as you can accidentally transfer germs from your fingers to your wound.
• Wherever possible we try to leave your dressing undisturbed.

• If you have any concerns about your wound, please tell the nurse looking after you.

• Hand hygiene is the most important thing we can all do to prevent the spread of infection. If you think any of our doctors/nurses have forgotten to wash their hands before touching your wound, then it is ok to remind them.

• Your hair can be washed using Octenisan body wash 48 hours after your surgery. This is providing you have no leakage from your wound or have a drain in place.

How can I tell if I have a wound infection?

You may develop one or more of the following symptoms

• The skin around your wound becomes red, hot and swollen.
• Your wound becomes painful
• Your wound has a discharge coming from it.
• You feel generally unwell or you have a temperature.

If these symptoms happen and you have been discharged home, then you should contact your ward and request to speak to the nurse in charge for further advice. If you have had spinal surgery please contact the Spinal Nurse Team on 529 8853 in the first instance.

Date Approved: March 2016
Author: Infection Prevention and Control Team
Version 3
Review Date: March 2020