



BLOODSTREAM INFECTIONS FROM CENTRAL LINES — FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (ALSO KNOWN AS “CATHETER-ASSOCIATED BLOODSTREAM INFECTIONS”)

KEY POINTS:

- Germs can enter your blood through your catheter. When germs enter your blood, they can cause very serious illness.
- Do not touch your catheter or the skin around the catheter while you are in the hospital.
- Your doctor and nurse must clean their hands before touching your catheter.
- If the skin around your catheter becomes red or painful tell your doctor or nurse immediately.
- If the bandage on your catheter gets wet, dirty, or falls off, tell your doctor or nurse.

WHAT IS A CATHETER-ASSOCIATED BLOODSTREAM INFECTION?

A “central line” or “central catheter” is a tube that is placed into a patient’s large vein, usually in the neck, chest, arm, or groin. The catheter is often used to draw blood, or give fluids or medications. It may be left in place for several weeks. A bloodstream infection can occur when bacteria or other germs travel down a “central line” and enter the blood.

If you or your child develops a catheter-associated bloodstream infection it may start with fevers and chills or the skin around the catheter may become sore and red. Additionally, infants and young children may have other signs such as not drinking or eating well, breathing too fast or too slow, irritability or sleeping more. Call your or your child’s healthcare provider immediately if any of these symptoms occur.

CAN CATHETER-ASSOCIATED BLOODSTREAM INFECTIONS BE TREATED?

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

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT HOSPITALS ARE DOING TO PREVENT CATHETER-ASSOCIATED BLOODSTREAM INFECTIONS?

To prevent catheter-associated bloodstream infections doctors and nurses will:

- Choose a vein where the catheter can be safely inserted and where the risk for infection is small.
- Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before putting in the catheter.
- Wear a mask, cap, sterile gown, and sterile gloves when putting in the catheter to keep it sterile. The patient will be covered with a sterile sheet.
- Clean the patient’s skin with an antiseptic cleanser before putting in the catheter.

- Clean their hands. Then they will clean the catheter opening with an alcohol pad before using the catheter to give medications. In addition, healthcare providers should wear gloves when drawing blood from the catheter.
- Use aseptic (germ-free) technique when changing the bandage that covers the area where the catheter enters the skin. This means that the healthcare provider will wear a mask, clean their hands, and wear special germ-free gloves when applying your new bandage.
- Decide every day if the patient still needs to have the catheter. The catheter will be removed as soon as it is no longer needed.
- Carefully handle medications and fluids that are given through the catheter.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP PREVENT A CATHETER-ASSOCIATED BLOODSTREAM INFECTION?

- Ask the doctors and nurses to explain why the catheter is needed and for how long.
- Ask the doctors and nurses if they will be using all of the prevention methods discussed above.
- Make sure that all doctors and nurses caring for you or your child clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after caring for you.
- If the bandage comes off or becomes wet or dirty, tell the nurse or doctor immediately.
- Inform the nurse or doctor if the area around your catheter is sore or red immediately.

For Family and Friends:

- Do not let family and friends who visit touch the catheter 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 or your child.

IF YOU DO NOT SEE YOUR PROVIDERS CLEAN THEIR HANDS, PLEASE ASK THEM TO DO SO.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO WHEN I GO HOME FROM THE HOSPITAL?

Some patients are sent home from the hospital with a catheter in order to continue their treatment. If you or your child goes home with a catheter, the doctors and nurses will explain everything you need to know about taking care of your catheter.

- Make sure you understand how to care for the catheter before leaving the hospital. For example, ask for instructions on showering or bathing with the catheter and how to change the catheter dressing.
- Make sure you know who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.
- Make sure you wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before handling the catheter.
- Watch for the signs and symptoms of catheter-associated bloodstream infection, such as soreness or redness at the catheter site or fever. In children, watch for changes in feeding, sleeping, & breathing. Call your or your child’s healthcare provider immediately if any of these symptoms occur.

IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, PLEASE ASK YOUR OR YOUR CHILD’S DOCTOR OR NURSE.