



SSI PREVENTION – PATIENT PREPARATION: BATHING AND HAIR REMOVAL

Things you should know!

PATIENT BATHING

- A preoperative shower or bath decreases skin microbial colony counts and might reduce the risk of wound infections associated with skin bacteria, such as *Staphylococcus* spp. Most studies investigated the use of antiseptic products based on chlorhexidine gluconate; medicated soap containing povidone-iodine or triclocarban can also be used. However, the evidence about reducing wound infections is not very strong. Therefore, also for costs reasons, priority should mainly be given to accurate patient personal hygiene (i.e. bathing or showering with soap and water) before surgery.

HAIR REMOVAL

- Several studies and reviews of the literature have now shown that:
 - The incidence of SSI is higher when hair removal is performed by razor than by a clipper.
 - Removal of hair by shaving compared to no shaving has no benefit on the incidence of postoperative infection.
- Although the use of depilatories (e.g. creams) has been associated with a lower SSI risk than shaving or clipping, depilatories sometimes produce hypersensitivity reactions.
- Most studies support that hair removal, if any, should be done immediately before operation.
- American and European guidelines recommend not removing hair, unless it will interfere with the operation. If hair removal is necessary, it should be performed by clipping and not using razors.

Things you should do right!

1. All patients must receive instructions to use running clean water and plain or antimicrobial soap to perform a thorough bath or shower before the operation (ideally 1-2 hours before).
2. Hair removal should be avoided unless the surgeon thinks it might interfere with the operation site. In this case, the surgeon, with the help of a nurse, should carefully evaluate if hair removal is necessary.
3. When it is deemed by the surgeon that hair should be removed, clippers should be chosen, razors should never be used.
4. Clipping should be performed with care to avoid skin damage.
5. Hair removal, if deemed it necessary, should be done immediately before the operation.
6. After use, clippers should be cleaned and decontaminated with a suitable product according to manufacturer's instructions before being used on another patient.

Sources:

JW Alexander, et al. Updated Recommendations for Control of Surgical Site Infections. *Annals of Surgery* 2011; 253:1082-93
DJ Anderson et al. Strategies to Prevent Surgical Site Infections in Acute Care Hospitals. *Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol* 2008; 29:S51-S61