**Monitoring Surgical Wounds for Infection**

Maternity units in the West of England are working together to decrease wound infections after caesarean births.

**If you have had a caesarean birth, you will receive a text or email about a month after the birth** to check whether you have had any problems with your wound, so we can monitor the levels of wound infections. **This will only take about 5 minutes of your time.**

This leaflet explains what a surgical wound infection is and how we can try and prevent them. If you have any questions or are worried, please speak to a doctor or midwife caring for you.

**Wound infections**

Many bacteria live in and on our bodies as well as in our environment. Most bacteria are harmless, but a wound infection can happen when harmful bacteria enter the cut made in your skin for your caesarean birth.

A wound infection can develop at any time but usually occurs from two to three days after surgery until the wound has visibly healed (usually two to three weeks later). Although a recognised complication, wound infections are uncommon.

Most mothers won’t develop a wound infection and if they do the infection gets better quite quickly, but if your wound has opened up it can sometimes take days or weeks for the wound to heal properly.

**Preventing wound infections**

There are things you can do to help prevent a wound infection, such as:

* Shower with soap and water before you come into hospital,
* Do not shave the area where the cut will be with a razor in the 24 hours before your delivery, as this has been shown to increase infection. If any shaving is needed, the team will be able to do this with special clippers, which decrease the risk of infection.
* Keep yourself warm before and after arriving in the hospital.

The hospital team will also do several things to prevent a wound infection such as cleaning the wound area with antiseptic solution and giving you antibiotics just before the operation starts.

**Looking after your wound after the birth**

A dressing will be placed on your wound at the end of the procedure, which the midwife will remove the next day. Occasionally a specific dressing may be applied which will remain for longer, and if this is the case, you will be given specific instructions. The midwife will check for any signs of infection but if you are concerned about your wound, tell the midwife who is looking after you.

After you leave hospital:

Follow thesimple steps below to keep your wound clean and dry:

* Shower as soon as you feel able but do not put soap or toiletry products on your wound
* Make sure you wash your hands before touching your wound.
* If your tummy is covering your wound, try to lift it gently and shower underneath.
* Dry the wound by gently patting with a clean towel.
* Do not rub the wound.
* Wear loose fitting, high waisted underwear to prevent rubbing of the wound

The skin stitches will usually dissolve automatically.

Remember to rest when you can and take the help offered from your partner and/or support network.

**How will you know if you have a wound infection?**

Signs to look out for are:

* The skin around your wound gets red or sore
* Wound feels hot and swollen
* Your wound has a fluid discharge, often green or yellow pus
* Your wound opens up
* You feel generally unwell or have a temperature (fever)

The majority of mothers go home one or two days after a caesarean birth. A wound infection may happen after you go home, which is why you will be sent a text or email about a month after your birth, asking if you have/had any problems with your wound.

Letting us know about your experience - by completing this questionnaire - will help us to monitor the extent of wound infections and develop ways to prevent them. Don’t forget to press ‘submit’ at the end of the questionnaire!

**What to do if you have a wound infection:**

If you do develop symptoms or are worried, speak to your midwife or GP. They may take a sample from the surface of your wound with a swab and send it to the laboratory for tests or prescribe antibiotics to treat the infection. Sometimes, the wound is opened up deliberately to let out the infection and might need special dressings after.

Keep yourself well hydrated and take pain killing medication as required.

Thank you for your help with improving this aspect of our care.

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