Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

What is a CLABSI?

This information explains what a central line-associated bloodstream infection (CLABSI) is and ways you can help prevent them.

What is a CLABSI?

A CLABSI stands for central line-associated bloodstream infection. A CLABSI is a serious infection. It happens when germs get into your bloodstream through a central venous catheter (CVC). CVC is another word for central line.

A CVC is a catheter (long, flexible tube) that's put into your vein. Your CVC may be an implanted port, a PICC line, or a tunneled catheter. For more information about PICC lines, read *About Your Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC)* (www.mskcc.org/pe/about-picc). For more information about tunneled catheters, read *About Your Tunneled Catheter* (www.mskcc.org/pe/about-tunneled-catheter). For more information about implanted ports, read *About Your Implanted Port* (www.mskcc.org/pe/implanted-port).

How can I prevent a CLABSI?

There are lots of things you can do to help prevent an infection. Please share this information with your caregivers.

- Take a shower every day.
  - It is important to clean your skin with a chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) skin cleanser or a CHG wipe. You can use the CHG cleanser while in the shower. You can use CHG wipes after you shower using normal soap.
  - Before you shower, put a waterproof cover (such as AquaGuard®) over your CVC.
  - During your shower, clean your skin with a 4% chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) solution antiseptic skin cleanser (such as Hibiclens®) or normal soap. For more information about showering with a CVC, watch *Showering While You Have a Central Venous Catheter (CVC)* (www.mskcc.org/pe/shower-cvc) and read *How to Shower Using 4% Chlorhexidine Gluconate (CHG) Solution Antiseptic Skin Cleanser* (www.mskcc.org/pe/chg-solution).
  - If you did not use a CHG cleanser in the shower, use 2% CHG wipes after you shower. For more information on using CHG cloths, read *How to Bathe Using 2% CHG Cloths* (www.mskcc.org/pe/bathe-using-chgcloths).

    - After your shower, dry the waterproof cover before removing it. If your dressing is wet, call your nurse to change the dressing. Bacteria grows in moist surfaces. That raised your risk for getting a CLABSI.
    - If you're not in the hospital, please call your doctor's office and ask to have your dressing changed.
- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Ask your visitors and caregivers to clean their hands often, too.
    - If you're washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands and apply soap. Rub your hands together for 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a paper towel and use that same towel to turn off the faucet.
    - If you're using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, be sure to cover your hands with it. Then, rub your hands together until they're dry.
- Talk with your care team about any concerns you have.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you have redness, pain, swelling, or liquid around the place where your CVC goes into your body.
- If your disinfection cap falls off at home, replace it. If you are at MSK, tell your nurse.
- Avoid touching your CVC dressing or lines.

- If you notice your dressing is falling off, please tell your nurse or call your doctor's office. Ask to schedule having your dressing changed.
- Make sure your dressing is changed every 7 days or if it gets wet or soiled.

What are the signs and symptoms of CLABSI?

The most common signs of a CLASBI are:

- A fever above 100.4 °F (38°C).
- Chills.
- Confusion.
- Having less energy than usual.
- Feeling dizzy.
- Redness, pain, swelling, or drainage around the place where your CVC goes into your body.

If your care team thinks you may have a CLABSI, they will take samples of your blood. They will send the samples to a lab to test for bacteria and fungus. These tests are called blood cultures.

Blood cultures usually take 48 to 72 hours (2 to 3 days). Your care team will share your results with you once they have them. They're also available on MSK MyChart, our patient portal.

How is a CLABSI treated?

If your blood cultures are positive (they show you have an infection), you must get treatment. Your healthcare provider will order antibiotics if the CLABSI is caused by bacteria. Antibiotics are medications to kill bacteria. Your healthcare provider will order antifungals if the CLABSI is caused by fungus. Antifungals are medications that kill fungus. The type of treatment you get depends on the type of bacteria or fungus in your bloodstream.

What to expect when you're in the hospital

- Your nurses will check your CVC dressing during every shift. They will make sure it's clean, dry, and in place.
- A nurse will wipe your CVC dressing and IV tubing with CHG cloths every 12 hours.
- Your care team will decide if you still need to have a CVC every day.
- Your nurse will not disconnect your IV tubing when you take a shower or walk around.
- Your nurse wipes surfaces that are touched often, such as bedside table and bedrails, twice a day with Sani-Cloth® wipes. This helps to keep your area free of germs.
- Your care team will make sure you have an appointment to have your dressing changed within 7 days of

discharge (leaving the hospital).

What to expect during your appointments at MSK

- Your nurse will check if your CVC dressing needs to be changed.
- Your nurse will check for swelling, redness, and drainage around the place where your CVC goes into your body. They will also ask if the area is painful.
- Your care team will decide if you still need to have a CVC.
- Your care team will remind you and your caregivers about washing your hands. For more information about hand hygiene, read *Hand Hygiene and Preventing Infection* (www.mskcc.org/pe/hand-hygiene).

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

What is a CLABSI? - Last updated on April 23, 2026
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center