

## How to Prevent Central Line Bloodstream Infections in the Hospital

### What is a “central line”?

A “central line” is a tube that is placed into a large vein, usually in the neck, chest, arm, or groin. The central line is used to give medicines. A bloodstream infection can occur when bacteria or other germs travel down a central line and enter the blood.

### What is a central line-associated bloodstream infection (CLABSI)?

A central line-associated bloodstream infection, or CLABSI, is among the most serious and costly of all healthcare-associated infections. If you develop a CLABSI, you may become ill with fevers and chills. Severe infections can result in:

- Septic shock (collapse of blood pressure due to infection)
- Organ damage or failure
- Abnormal blood clotting
- Longer hospital stays
- Death

### Causes of a CLABSI

- The catheter serves as an entry point for germs. These germs can cause infections in the bloodstream with a risk of serious complications. The longer a central line remains in place, the higher the risk of infection.
- Skin flora changes from normal to “hospital acquired” within 24-48 hours of being in the hospital. This raises the risk of infection.

### Ways to Prevent a CLABSI

Your healthcare team will do many things to lower the risk of a CLABSI in the hospital.

This includes:

- **Daily chlorhexidine (CHG or Hibiclens) treatment:** Daily CHG treatments are used to reduce the numbers of germs on your skin. This soap is very good because it kills germs on your skin for a longer time than other soaps.
  - CHG has been shown to help reduce hospital acquired infections.
  - CHG may also lower the risk of healthcare providers passing bacteria from one patient to another.
- **Removing central lines when no longer necessary:** It is best to remove a central line as soon as it is no longer needed. A central line cannot be kept in place only for blood draws; the risk for infection is too high.
- **Other strategies:** Your nurse will assess your central line, complete dressing changes, and talk with your doctor about whether the catheter is still needed.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 7/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8293.