Prevent Central Venous Catheter (CVC) Infections

A central venous catheter, also called a CVC is a special type of IV that is placed into a large vein in your body. You may also hear this called a Central line, Groshong, Hickman, PICC or Apheresis catheter, based on the type of catheter. The type of catheter you have will depend on your treatment needs.

A CVC may be used to give you fluids, medicines or other treatments and can be used to take blood for tests. The catheter may be placed in the chest, neck, arm or groin. The catheter can stay in place as long as you need it and it is working well. This may be for several weeks to a year or longer. It can easily be removed when you no longer need it for your treatment.

This handout gives the signs of infection and the care that will be done to limit your risk for infection.

Signs of Infection

Having a central line can put you at risk for infection. Germs can travel along the tube and enter your blood stream. An infection may cause the following symptoms:

- Fever or chills
- The skin around where the catheter exits the body, can become red, sore or tender.

Call your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms. An infection can be serious and may require that the central line be removed. Often an infection can be treated with antibiotics. Care will be done to reduce your risk of infection before the catheter is placed and for as long as you have the catheter.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

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Care to Prevent Infection

The best way to limit the spread of germs is to be sure that you or anyone who cares for your CVC washes their hands well and often. **Hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol based hand sanitizer must be done before anyone touches or cares for your CVC.** If you are going home with a catheter in place, you will be taught how to take care of your catheter.

**Before your catheter is placed:**
Your doctors and nurses will take the following steps to reduce the risk for infection. They will:

- Wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Wear a mask, cap, sterile gown and sterile gloves.
- Clean your skin at the site with a special soap to kill the germs on your skin where the catheter will be put in your body.
- Cover your skin with a sterile sheet at the catheter site before it is placed.

**After your catheter is placed:**

- Anyone caring for you should clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol based hand sanitizer before they touch your catheter.
- The dressing protects your catheter site and helps to prevent infection. The dressing should be kept clean and dry at all times.
- Gloves should be worn by the person when providing CVC care and when the dressing is changed.
- An alcohol port protector (such as a Curos) may be used to cover the injection cap to keep it clean. If you do not use a port protector, you must scrub the injection cap with an alcohol pad for 15 to 30 seconds and let it dry completely before the catheter is used.

**What you can do to prevent infection**

- Wash your hands and be sure all visitors wash their hands well before and after they visit.
- Do not let the catheter tubing touch the floor
- **Do not let family or friends touch the catheter or tubing unless they have learned how to care for the CVC.**
- If the dressing becomes loose, wet or dirty, it should be changed.
Important Safety Precautions

- Keep pets away from the CVC. Put pets in another room when the catheter care is done.
- Always wash your hands right after having contact with any pets.
- **Do not** touch any pet urine or feces.
- **Do not** clean litter boxes, cages or aquariums.
- **Do not** take a tub bath, swim or do activities that may cause the CVC site to become wet or dirty.
- Daily hygiene is important when you have a CVC. Keep your skin clean to help reduce the chance of an infection.
- You may take a shower with a CVC in place. You need to keep the dressing and the catheter area dry.
  - Each time you shower, cover the CVC site with a new piece of plastic wrap. Tuck all lumens of the catheter under the plastic wrap and tape the edges down. This keeps the dressing and catheter dry.
  - To reduce the chance of infection, use the same roll of plastic wrap to cover your CVC each time. Do not use this roll of plastic wrap for kitchen use or cooking.
- If you do not use a port protector (such as a Curos), scrub the injection cap with an alcohol pad for 15 to 30 seconds and let it dry completely before the catheter is used.
- **If the CVC injection cap or tubing becomes disconnected, clamp the tubing right away and call your doctor for instructions.**

For More information about your CVC, talk with your health care team.