

CENTRAL LINE INFECTIONS (CLI)

Fact Sheet for Patients and Visitors

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

WHAT ARE CLI?

CLI occurs when a central venous catheter (or “line”) placed into a patient’s vein gets infected. This happens when bacteria grow in the line and spreads to the patient’s blood stream.

Patients require a central line when blood, fluid replacement and/or nutrition need to be given to them intravenously. Central lines also allow health care providers to monitor fluid status and make determinations about the heart and blood.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CLI?

- Redness, pain or swelling at or near the catheter site
- Pain or tenderness along the path of the catheter
- Drainage from the skin around the catheter
- Sudden fever or chills

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR CLI?

Anyone who has a central line can get an infection. The risk is higher if you:

- Are in the intensive care unit (ICU)
- Have a serious underlying illness or debilitation
- Are receiving bone marrow or chemotherapy
- Have the line in for an extended time

WHAT SHOULD HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS DO TO PREVENT CLI?

Health care providers should take the following precautions to prevent CLI:

- Practice proper handwashing techniques. Everyone who touches the central line must wash their hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand rub.
- Wear sterile clothing – a mask, gloves and hair covering – when putting in the line. The patient should be covered with a sterile drape with a small hole where the line goes in.
- Clean the patient’s skin with “chlorhexidine” (a type of soap) when the line is put in.
- Choose the most appropriate vein to insert the line.
- Check the line every day for infection.
- Replace the line as needed and not on a schedule.
- Remove the line as soon as it is no longer needed.

PREVENTING CENTRAL LINE INFECTIONS: WHAT PATIENTS CAN DO

- Ask lots of questions. Find out why you need the line and where it will be placed. Learn what steps the hospital is taking to reduce the danger of infection.

- Wash your own hands often. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60 per cent alcohol.
- Try not to touch your line or dressing.

HOW IS CLI TREATED?

Treatment depends on the type of catheter, the severity of the infection and the patient's overall health. Generally, your doctor will prescribe antibiotics to fight the infection and the central line may need to be removed. In some cases, the line is flushed with high doses of antibiotics to kill the germs causing the infection so that the line does not have to be removed.

REFERENCE

For more information about the importance of good hand hygiene practices, read about the *Clean Hands Protect Lives* campaign at www.oha.com.