

Glossary Terms

Antibiotics: Medicine that destroys microorganisms (bacteria).

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR): The overuse of antibiotics means they are less effective. There are some bacteria (microorganisms) that are resistant to some antibiotics and cannot be destroyed by them.

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Artery: An artery is a blood vessel which carries blood around the body to supply all organs, muscles and tissues with nutrients such as oxygen and sugar. They are all over the body and vary in size.

Bacteria: Bacteria are a type of germ that are not visible to the naked eye. They are everywhere on our body, both inside and outside. Many bacteria are good for you and cause you no trouble. However, some bacteria can grow very rapidly and cause infection, particularly in wounds after surgery.

Bacterial resistance: The overuse of antibiotics means they are less effective. There are some bacteria (microorganisms) that are resistant to some antibiotics and cannot be destroyed by them.

BMI: Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure that uses your height and weight to work out if you are a healthy weight for your height.

Bypass surgery: Heart bypass surgery or coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) is used to improve blood flow to your heart. The heart is a muscle that needs its own supply of blood to work. When its own blood supply is reduced by being blocked, bypass surgery can restore the supply. A healthy artery or vein is grafted to bypass the blocked artery or vein.

CABG: Heart bypass surgery or coronary artery bypass graft (CABG) is used to improve blood flow to your heart. A healthy artery or vein is grafted to bypass the blocked artery or vein.

Clean surgery: Surgery is performed on a part of the body which is not infected and is not likely to become contaminated during surgery. Clean surgery usually has a low risk of wound infection. Heart surgery is considered clean surgery.

Contaminated surgery: A surgical procedure where the sterility of the operation has failed. For example, when contents from the bowel or pus from an abscess spills into the wound.

Coronary artery: The heart is a muscle and just like all muscles in the body it needs blood to bring it nutrients such as oxygen and sugar. The blood vessels supplying the heart muscle with blood are called the coronary arteries. There are two main coronary arteries, one on the left and one on the right and then branch into many important, smaller arteries.

Decolonisation: When medicine is used to rid a patient of bacteria that is resistant to some antibiotics.

Deep incisional infection: The wound infection is beneath the top layer of skin, deeper than a superficial infection, but still involves the wound incision (ie the infection has not spread to the internal organs or bone).

Diabetes: An illness where there is insufficient insulin to break down glucose (sugar) in your body and the levels of glucose in your blood become too high.

Dressing: A protective material that covers a wound.

Emergency surgery: Surgery that must take place immediately and cannot be delayed. There may be less, or no time, to prepare fully for emergency surgery.

Graft: A piece of living tissue which is transplanted from one part of the body to another. In cardiac surgery, this almost always means taking a healthy blood vessel (an artery or a vein) and transplanting it into a part of the heart with poor blood supply.

Implant: An implant is a man-made object that is put inside you to carry out a specific function such as metal wires to stitch your bones together or an acrylic tube to act as a blood vessel to supply blood to your heart or a device to stimulate the heart to pump, called a pacemaker.

Incision: The cut that the surgeons makes to gain access to inside your body is called an incision or wound.

Incision site: The area immediately around and underneath the cut that the surgeons makes to gain access to inside your body.

Mediastinitis: This is an inflammation (swelling and irritation) of the chest area between the lungs. Commonly called a 'deep infection; but to avoid confusion with 'deep incisional infection' when monitoring infections, this more severe type of infection is called an 'organ or space infection'.

MRSA: Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is a bacteria that is resistant to most common antibiotics. Around one third of people have MRSA on their skin and this does not cause any problems. However, if MRSA gets inside your body through a break in your skin then it can cause an infection which will be difficult to get rid of.

Negative pressure dressing: A 'negative pressure' dressing is used to treat wounds that may be difficult to heal. A dressing which is attached to a small battery powered suction device which gently sucks air and excess fluid out of the wound area and helps the wound to heal more quickly.

Organ/space infections: An infection involving internal parts of the body, other than the incision, which is opened or handled during surgery.

Planned surgery: An operation that has been booked in advance (unlike emergency surgery).

Pre-operative showering: Washing for a few days (preferably with a shower) before your surgery using an antibacterial liquid soap to reduce the number of bacteria on your skin and hair.

Prophylactic antibiotics: Antibiotics which are given to non-infected patients to prevent them from going on to develop an infection.

Public Health England (PHE): An organisation sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care to protect and improve the nation's health.

Risk: Exposure to danger or harm.

Risk assessment: A method to calculate how likely it is someone will become harmed, for example by developing an infection.

Risk factor: Something that increases someone's chance of becoming harmed.

Risk factor tool: A method to calculate how likely it is someone will become harmed due to the risk factors they have, for example by developing an infection.

Screening: A way of identifying apparently healthy people who may have an increased risk of a particular condition such as MRSA.

Stent: A tiny tube that a doctor can insert into a blocked passageway to keep it open to help the flow of blood or other fluids.

Sterile: Free from bacteria and any other micro-organisms, totally clean.

Sternum: The breast bone in the middle of the chest between the nipples. It runs from just below the collarbones down to the bottom of the rib cage.

Sternotomy: A cut made down the middle of the breast bone and overlying skin.

Superficial incisional infection: A wound infection where the infection is limited to the top layer of the skin.

Surveillance: Following up patients to see if they develop an infection.

Suture: A stitch.

Synthetic material grafts: A man made tube that is connected between a blood vessel and a part of the heart with poor blood supply, with the purpose of creating a blood supply.

Tailor: To adapt treatments so that they are specific to individual patients.

Targeting: Giving treatments to patients who have been identified as needing them most. This means that patients who are unlikely to need treatments are not given them unnecessarily.

Urinary tract infection (UTI): A urinary tract infection is an infection that can affect the bladder, the kidneys and the tubes connected to them. They can be treated with antibiotics.

Vein: A vein is a blood vessel which carries blood back from the body to the heart and lungs where the lungs will remove waste products and restock the blood with oxygen.

Water infection: Also known as a urinary tract infection or UTI. It is an infection that can affect the bladder, the kidneys and the tubes connected to them. They can be treated with antibiotics.

Wound infection: An infection at the site of your surgery. It happens when bacteria get into your wound and multiply. An infected wound may be discoloured, hot, swollen, painful and leak pus (white, yellow, green or coffee coloured thick cloudy fluid). If you have an infected wound you might also have a high temperature of above 38°C or feel feverish.

Wound infection rate: The percentage of patients who have developed a wound infection.