



Information for Patients & Caregivers

What You Need to Know if You Have a
Skin or Soft Tissue Infection.

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+ WHAT IS A SKIN & SOFT TISSUE INFECTION?

Skin and soft-tissue infections (SSTIs) include a variety of pathological conditions. It can be infections of skin, subcutaneous tissue, fascia, or muscle that occur due to the viral or microbial invasion.

There are various categories of infections defined by the origin, presentation, anatomical parameters, and other aspects. Importantly, SSTIs can be classified based on the prognosis:

- **Uncomplicated** (low risk):

Superficial infections that occur at the skin's surface such as cellulitis, simple abscesses, impetigo, furuncles, and some other infections.

- **Complicated** (high risk):

Deep soft-tissue infections such as necrotising infections, infected ulcers, infected burns, and major abscesses and other.

These fall into two groups: non-necrotising and necrotising.

+ RISK FACTORS

There is a number of factors that increase the risk of developing an SSTI. These include:

- Age.
- Presence of other diseases such as diabetes, obesity, chronic venous or lymphatic insufficiency, atopic dermatitis, other skin diseases.
- Trauma and injuries.
- Reduced efficacy of the immune system (Immunosuppression).
- Poor hygiene and nutrition.
- Crowded living conditions.
- And some other factors.

+ SYMPTOMS OF SSTIs

The clinical features of mild, moderate, and severe infections are different.

Mild infections present with local symptoms, such as:

- Redness.
- Swelling.
- Warmth.
- Tenderness.
- Pain.

More complex SSTIs present with systemic signs of infection, including:

- Fever.
- Increased heart rate and breathing.
- Tiredness and lack of energy.
- Nausea or vomiting.

UNCOMPLICATED SSTIs ARE NOT LIFE- OR LIMB-THREATENING IF THEY ARE DIAGNOSED AND TREATED IN A TIMELY MANNER

COMPLICATED SSTIs ARE LIFE THREATENING

Mild infections are typically self-limiting and usually do not require medical attention. Specialist care and medical treatment are also not needed.

However, in some circumstances, you may need to seek medical advice. Severe infections may require hospitalisation.

Skin and soft tissue infections are common and can occur at any age, but most often they affect young children and older adults



+ WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

You should talk to your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Infection associated with fever or other signs of systemic infection.
- Signs of progression after a few days: pain, redness, or swelling spreads.
- The wound gets pus, fluid, or crust and pain remains.
- Inflammation does not go away or even gets worse despite treatment.

NOTE:

Pink or red skin and swelling around the wound are normal. Some amount of pain is also normal, but it should start to go away after the second day.

+ WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WILL DO

In hospital, the doctor will ask you questions that help to find out a possible cause of the infection.

The doctor will examine the infected area and order laboratory tests to identify the pathogen. Blood or pus from the wound may be collected.

Diagnostic imaging may be required in some cases. There are several options available and your doctor will decide which type of studies suits better for your diagnosis.

Because some infectious diseases are difficult to recognise and diagnose, your doctor may discuss your symptoms and laboratory findings with an infectious disease specialist, dermatologist, microbiologist, or surgeon. You may also need to see these specialists.

Sometimes, surgical exploration of the wound may be required to

+ TREATMENT OPTIONS

Mild skin infections (such as small skin abscesses, folliculitis, carbuncles and some other infections) do not require any specific treatment. They often drain naturally without leaving a scar. Most patients do not need antibiotics.

You may apply warm moist compresses to reduce swelling and speed up the recovery. Local wound care will also be helpful.

In more complicated cases, your doctor may start empirical anti-microbial treatment with *antibiotics*. Depending on the severity of your symptoms and culture results, you may need to change the medication later.

ANTIBIOTICS MUST BE PRESCRIBED BY A HEALTHCARE SPECIALIST.

TAKING ANTIBIOTICS OR GIVING THEM TO YOUR CHILD WITHOUT A PRESCRIPTION CAN BE DANGEROUS.

Tell your doctor if you have health problems that are known risk factors for SSTIs.



+ PREVENTION

Keep your hands clean. Proper and frequent hand hygiene is a very important way to prevent skin infections. You should wash your hands thoroughly with soap in warm water. Dry your hands properly after washing.

Keep your body clean. Shower regularly and don't share your personal items such as razors and towels.

Prevent insect bites. If they happen, avoid scratching of these areas. Oral antihistamines can help reduce itching.

Avoid petting stray cats and dogs. Animal bites often result into contaminated wounds.

Take care of injuries as soon as they happen. Wash the wound immediately with soap and water. Keep it clean and

Some skin infections can be prevented with vaccines.

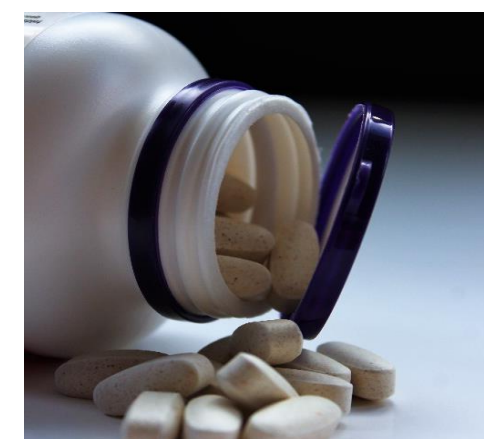
Routine childhood immunisation with *measles-mumps-rubella* (MMR) or *measles-mumps-rubella-varicella* (MMRV) vaccine will keep your child protected from these viral infections.

With appropriate treatment, the outcome of soft tissue infections is typically positive and favourable.

+ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on the management of tobacco dependence can be found in the National Clinical Guideline published by The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) Qatar.

The Guideline is available to the public from the MoPH website: www.moph.gov.qa



Speak to your doctor if you are allergic to antibiotics or any other medication.

+ SURGICAL TREATMENT

Incision and surgical removal of the infected tissue are rarely required.

These, however, may be needed in case of aggressive necrotising SSTIs, which can occur after penetrating or blunt trauma or after complicated abdominal, urological, or genital operations with a spreading infection.

Repeated surgeries may be needed to clean the wound and remove all affected tissue in this case.

To save your life, antibiotic treatment of necrotising infections should be prompt and aggressive.