



Preventing Central Line Bloodstream Infections

What is a central line bloodstream infection?

A “central line” is a type of catheter. A catheter is a thin flexible tube that is placed in a large vein to give medications and fluids and to draw blood. It may be left in for several days or several weeks. Some types of catheters may be left in place for even longer (months or years).

If germs get into the catheter, you may get a central line bloodstream infection. Signs that you may have an infection are fever and chills and the skin around the catheter may get red and sore.

Can this type of infection be treated?

Yes, antibiotics usually work, and the infection goes away. The catheter may need to be removed.

What is Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) doing to prevent this type of infection?

At MGH, we:

1. Choose the safest place on your body to put the catheter.
2. Clean our hands with alcohol-based hand cleaner or soap and water just before putting the catheter in.
3. Wear masks, sterile gloves and gowns, and cover you with a sterile sheet when inserting the catheter.
4. Clean your skin with a special type of soap that kills germs (chlorhexidine).
5. Always clean the catheter before using it to keep the opening germ-free.
6. Clean our hands and wear gloves when changing the bandage that covers the catheter.
7. Remove the catheter as soon as it is no longer needed.

You can also help prevent infection

1. Make sure staff clean their hands before caring for your catheter.
2. Tell your doctor or nurse if your bandage is loose or becomes wet or dirty.
3. Tell your doctor or nurse if the area is red or sore.
4. Ask visitors to clean their hands before and after they visit.
5. If you go home with the catheter; follow the instructions your nurse gives you on caring for catheter at home.

This document has been reviewed for plain language by the staff of the Blum Center.