

Prevent Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter (PICC) Infections

A PICC is a special type of IV that is placed into a vein in your arm. It may be used to give you fluids, medicines or other treatments and can be used to take blood for tests. The PICC 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 PICC in place 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
- Redness, swelling, tenderness or warmth at the PICC site
- Drainage at the PICC site

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

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 PICC 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 PICC.** If you are going home with a PICC in place, you will be taught how to take care of your PICC.

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

When the PICC 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 PICC will be put in your body.
- Cover your skin with a sterile sheet at the PICC site before it is placed.

After your PICC is placed:

- Anyone caring for you should wash their hands with soap and water or an alcohol based hand sanitizer before they touch your PICC.
- The dressing protects your PICC site and helps to prevent infection. The dressing should be kept clean, dry and secure at all times.
- Sterile gloves and a mask must be worn by the person doing the PICC dressing change.
- An alcohol port protector (such as a Curoc) may be used to cover the injection cap to keep it clean. There are different types of port protectors, so follow the instructions given to you for how long to keep the port protector on the injection cap.
- 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 PICC is used.

What you can do to prevent infection

- Practice good hygiene.
- Wash your hands and be sure all visitors wash their hands well before and after they visit.
- Do not let the PICC tubing touch the floor.
- **Do not let family or friends touch the PICC or tubing unless they have learned how to care for the PICC.**
- Do not tape down a loose or wet dressing. If the dressing becomes loose, wet or dirty, change it right away.

Important Safety Precautions

- **Do not** work in the garden or with soil with a PICC.
- Keep pets away from the PICC. Put pets in another room when the PICC 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 PICC site to become wet or dirty.
- Daily hygiene is important when you have a PICC. Keep your skin clean to help reduce the chance of an infection.
- You may take a shower with a PICC in place. You need to keep the dressing and the PICC area dry.
 - ▶ Each time you shower, cover the PICC site with a new piece of plastic wrap. Tuck all lumens of the PICC under the plastic wrap and tape the edges down. This keeps the dressing and PICC dry.
 - ▶ To reduce the chance of infection, use the same roll of plastic wrap to cover your PICC 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 Curoc), scrub the injection cap with an alcohol pad for 15 to 30 seconds and let it dry completely before the PICC is used. Let the cap dry completely, do not let anything touch the cap while it dries.
- **If the PICC injection cap or tubing becomes disconnected, clamp the tubing right away and call your doctor for instructions.**

For more information about your PICC, talk with your health care team.