

Assessing for Infection: When to get help?

Skin Infections: 2 basic types

(Both caused by bacteria)

Cellulitis

Simple infection of the top skin layers. No Pus.

- RED or DARK
- HOT
- PAINFUL
- SWOLLEN

Abscess

Deeper, "infection pocket."

- Key sign = PUS, drains when open.
- If not open, feels like a semi-soft ball.

both infection types can spread down to muscle or bone

Consider the whole picture // whole person

Examples – any immune problems (active HIV, liver disease, diabetes, etc.); is the wound being left alone or irritated, etc.

Identifying an emergency

Systemic Infection/Sepsis:

Infections can cause a systemic response which can be dangerous and needs hospitalization.

Signs:

- Fast heart (> 100 beats per minute)
- Fast breathing (> 20 breaths per minute)
- Fevers/sweats (sometimes chills)
- Confusion/sleepiness

Bloodstream Infection:

Skin infections can get into veins and spread to other parts of the body, especially the heart (endocarditis).

Signs:

- Red tracking up a vein
- Chest pain or pain with breathing
- Fast heart
- Other signs of sepsis listed above

Either of these require IV Antibiotics and other care only available in the hospital.

**Go to the
Emergency
Room!**

Maybe not an emergency but needs a doctor or medicine

Sometimes the body can get rid of infections on their own, sometimes not.

Cellulitis usually needs oral antibiotics.

- If small & person doesn't want medical care, draw a line around the redness
- Check back in in 1-3 days. If redness has spread beyond the line, that's a sign the body is not getting rid of the infection on its own and person needs meds

Abscesses are more complicated

- Small abscesses (2cm or less) sometimes can be destroyed by the body
- Reasons for antibiotics:
 - Bigger than 2cm
 - More than 1 abscess
 - Not getting better on its own or growing
 - Any of the signs listed under emergency

Note: Infections aren't the only reason a wound needs a doctor or hospital, but they're the most common and (usually) the most urgent