How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to or after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

If you require a translation of this leaflet please call ENT Department on 01494 425426 or 01296 315770

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This information leaflet has been given to you to help answer some of the questions you might have about your tonsillectomy surgery. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives to this procedure. It also outlines what you can expect if you decide to have surgery. If you have any questions or concerns then please do not hesitate to speak to your doctor or nurse.

**What is a tonsillectomy?**
A tonsillectomy is the surgical removal of the tonsils. The tonsils are two almond-shaped mounds of lymphatic tissue that sit on either side of the back of the throat. They are part of your body’s system to fight infection and are only important during the first few weeks of life.

This surgery is normally performed as a day case, which means you will come into the hospital for the operation and leave on the same day. It is performed under a general anaesthetic, which means you will be asleep for the entire operation.

**Why do I need a tonsillectomy?**
A tonsillectomy is usually suggested if you have:
- Repeated episodes of tonsillitis or quinsy – an infection of the tonsils which can cause a severe sore throat, high temperature and difficulty in swallowing.
- Swollen tonsils that cause you to snore or hold your breath at night.
- Swollen tonsils that make it harder to breathe or swallow.
- Sore throats that often interrupt your work or everyday life

**What are the benefits?**
Your general health may improve because removing your tonsils will prevent further episodes of tonsillitis. You may still get sore throats, but this should not occur as often.
Are there any alternative treatments?
You may choose not to have your tonsils removed. Episodes of tonsillitis can be treated with antibiotics and pain relief. If you choose not to have your swollen tonsils removed, you could develop other problems. Although rare, potential problems include an abscess forming, rheumatic fever, a very high fever or breathing difficulties. Please speak to your doctor for more information.

Asking for your consent
Before your surgery, you will need to sign a consent form. This confirms that you understand what the procedure involves and wish to go ahead.

What are the risks of having a tonsillectomy?
There are risks associated with any surgery. Your doctor will explain these risks to you before asking you to sign the consent form. Please ask questions if you are uncertain. Possible problems from this surgery are:
• A sore throat for about 10 to 14 days after the operation, which includes difficulty in swallowing.
• Bleeding – this can happen up to 2 weeks after the operation.
• An infection.
• Damaged teeth (please let us know beforehand if you have any loose, capped or crowned teeth).
• Complications from the general anaesthetic – the anaesthetist will explain these risks to you in more detail.
• There is also a risk of death with any operation. The risk is extremely small for this type of surgery.
What happens before the surgery?
We will give you an appointment to attend a pre-operative assessment clinic before your surgery. The pre-operative assessment nurse will check your general health and may carry out some tests. These are to ensure you are fit enough to have the anaesthetic and surgery. The nurse will also explain how you need to prepare for surgery. It is important you follow the instructions given to you by your doctor and nurse.

You will also receive information on how to access the leaflet “You and Your Anaesthetic” as well as some other leaflets. These leaflets give you information about the anaesthetic, how to prepare for it, what to bring with you on the day of your procedure and when you can expect to go home. If you do not have access to the internet, please ask us for a copy.

You will need to fast before having a general anaesthetic. Fasting means you cannot eat or drink anything (except for water) for six hours before surgery. At your pre-operative assessment appointment we will give you precise instructions about this and when to start fasting.

If you smoke, please stop smoking at least 48 hours before your surgery. Smoking increases the risk of complications such as chest infection and unwanted blood clots. The blood clots form because smoking increases the risk of the platelets in the blood sticking together and also damages the lining of the blood vessels. It can also delay wound healing. For help on giving up smoking, please speak to your nurse or call the NHS Smoking Helpline on 0800 16 0 169.

What if there is a problem at home?
Please contact the Day Surgery Unit on 01494 425581 (weekdays 8am to 7pm) or your GP if you have:
- A high temperature (38°C/100°F or above)
- Difficulty in taking fluids
- Your pain relief are not controlling your pain.

Please go straight to your nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) department if you are:
- Bringing up bright red, black or brown vomit – this may be blood and needs to be checked
- Spitting out bright red blood or large clots
- Having difficulty in breathing.

Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns about your tonsillectomy surgery:
- Before your surgery, please discuss them with the ENT Nurse Practitioner who you will see at your Pre-operative Assessment appointment.
- After your surgery please contact the Day Surgery Unit on 01494 425581 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 7pm)
**Can I eat and drink as normal after the operation?**
Keep drinking plenty of fluids e.g. 2 litres of water per day. You should be able to eat and drink as you normally would a day after the operation. A healthy, balanced diet will help your wound to heal and prevent infection.

You can keep the healing area (where the tonsils were) clean by eating food like toast and cereal. This may be difficult to do, but will help your throat to heal by removing dead tissue.

Taking your pain relief 45 minutes before a mealtime may make it more comfortable to eat.

**Can I brush my teeth as normal?**
It is important to brush your teeth after the operation. This will help prevent infections and help the sore area heal more quickly. It will also freshen your mouth.

**When can I go back to work?**
You may find it takes a couple of weeks to ‘get back to normal’. We encourage you to rest for the first few days and gradually get back to your normal routine.

We recommend you take 10-14 days off work. During this time, you should avoid large groups of people, people with coughs and colds, and smoky or dusty environments. This is because you are more vulnerable to picking up an infection while your throat is healing.

**Will I have a follow-up appointment?**
You will not usually need a follow-up appointment. We will tell you before you go home if one is needed.

**Pregnancy testing**
All women of childbearing age will need a pregnancy test. This is to ensure the general anaesthetic does not disturb an early pregnancy. Please use a barrier method of contraception, such as condom or diaphragm, before your operation.

On the day of the operation, we will ask your permission to perform a pregnancy test – you will need to give us a urine specimen for this. Your surgery will be cancelled if there is any possibility you might be pregnant.

**What happens during the operation?**
The operation is performed through the mouth, meaning there will be no external (outside) cuts or scars. It generally takes about 30 to 40 minutes. After surgery, you will be taken to the recovery room, where you will come round from the anaesthetic and once you have, you will be taken back to the ward.

**After my tonsillectomy, when can I go home?**
You can leave hospital on the same day as the operation, when you are able to eat and drink. However, you will need to stay for a minimum of six hours after your procedure so you can be observed for bleeding.

**What should I look out for at home?**
You might feel tired. Please rest on the day you go home and the following day. This will help you to recover from the general anaesthetic. Your throat will look white in colour and may develop scabs while it heals. This is normal.
Will I have any pain?
You will have a sore throat when you wake up and this can last for a few days, and can also increase during the first few days. This is because there will be two areas in the throat where the tonsils were removed, which will take about ten to twelve days to completely heal.

Some patients have an earache after surgery. This is because the tonsils share some of the same nerves. This is normal and should go away in about seven days. If it does not, please see your GP.

Some patients tell us that chewing gum or sucking ice helps with their pain, and can be especially beneficial if you have associated ear pain.

Medications
We will give you pain relief to take home with you and explain how to take each one so that you receive the maximum pain relief.

It is important to take your pain relief as instructed on a regular basis for the first few days. When taken regularly, the medication remains at a constant level in your body and controls your pain more effectively. After a few days, you can gradually reduce the medication until no longer needed. Please contact your GP or the hospital if your pain is difficult to control.

We will explain any medicine that we give you before you leave hospital. If you are uncertain, please contact the hospital or your GP for advice.

Some of the medication we give you contains Paracetamol, so you must not mix this with other medicines that also contain Paracetamol. It is important not to exceed the recommended daily dose of any medication you are given. Please ensure you read the medication label.

Bleeding
You may spit out small amounts of blood-stained saliva for the first day after the operation – this is normal.

Occasionally patients swallow a small amount of blood during the operation. This can make you sick, so do not worry if you are sick and notice a small amount of dark red blood in your vomit.

If you spit out or vomit bright red blood or large clots at any time, please go to the nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department immediately.

About five out of one hundred adults will return to hospital with bleeding which may need admission for observation or treating. Only one in a hundred will need to have a second operation to stop the bleeding.

Sutures
You may have sutures (stitches). These usually dissolve on their own within three weeks after the operation. They do not usually need to be removed and will fall out by themselves.