

# Eliminate Surgical Site Infections

Surgical site infections (SSIs) account for 31% of all healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), making SSIs the most common HAI among hospitalized patients (Magill, et al., Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol, 2012 Mar;33(3):283-91). Most of these infections can be prevented. Every year more hospitals are achieving rates of 0 surgical site infections. Each new quarter of reported data shows that we can dramatically reduce SSIs. You can too. Make a commitment to eliminate surgical site infections today. Based on our experiences collaborating with hundreds of hospitals across the nation, significant reductions occur when hospitals follow these 10 steps.

**1 Tap into the wisdom of frontline staff.**  
Engage frontline nurses and clinicians with the two-question survey:  
How will the next patient get an SSI? How can we prevent that SSI?

**2 Shift SSI rate ownership to unit leaders.**  
Transfer accountability to improve SSI rates from infection prevention (IP) to unit physician and nurse leaders.

**3 Collaborate with your infection preventionist.**  
Team up IPs with unit-level providers to train, monitor, investigate, and reduce infections.

**4 Partner with a senior executive.**  
Meet with a senior executive monthly. This partnership will help your team align improvement efforts with organizational priorities, navigate challenges to changing organizational practice, and foster accountability. Senior leadership must commit to eliminating surgical site infections.

**5 Audit SSI prevention practices.**  
Review and audit SSI prevention practices to identify local opportunities for improvement.

**6 Investigate all SSIs as defects.**  
Identify local opportunities to learn from defects. Then develop a plan to improve system of care delivery and prevent future infections.

**7 Build a local bundle.**  
No single SSI prevention bundle can eliminate SSIs. Identify the defects in your surgical area using steps 1, 5, and 6 to build a local bundle. Your bundle will address the defects that contribute to your SSIs. Bundles can change over time.

**8 Standardize SSI prevention measures.**  
Standardizing care is a fundamental principle for reducing preventable harm, including preventing SSIs. Only evidence-based practices or theory should drive procedure variation between patients or clinical units. Evidence-based deviations are mindful and appropriate, rather than stemming from outdated tradition and power hierarchies.

**9 Display current SSI rates and trends.**  
All surgical staff should know the current rates and trends, so post prominently. Discuss local rates with your entire clinical unit to foster ownership and provide continuous feedback. Set your goal at ZERO surgical site infections.

**10 Train new staff in SSI prevention.**  
Incorporate SSI prevention training into nurse, resident, and physician orientation programs.