

# Surgery to drain your child's skin abscess

Children's Hospital

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Information for Patients, Parents & Carers

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## What is an abscess?

An abscess is a cavity containing pus. They can be found anywhere on the body and are caused by bacterial organisms which live on the skin or in the body.

- skin abscesses – which develop under the skin
- internal abscesses – which develop inside the body, in an organ or in the spaces between organs

Common places to find skin abscesses are under the arm, around the neck and near the bottom (anus).

## What causes an abscess in children?

Usually these are caused by irritation in a hair follicle which can develop into an abscess but it could also develop from an open wound infection.

Skin abscess cannot be prevented in children.

## What are the symptoms of a skin abscess?

The symptoms are a raised bump which will be red and maybe hot to touch. The lump will also be painful and unlikely to disappear on its own, unless it pops. Your child may also have temperatures and be generally unwell.

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**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## How is a skin abscess diagnosed?

The abscess is diagnosed by assessment by a doctor. It is unlikely that the abscess will go away on its own so the operation will be needed.

## How is a skin abscess treated?

The abscess is cut (incised) and drained so that the pus can get out. The cavity is washed out in theatre, dressing is applied and it is left to heal. During the operation a sample of pus may be taken and sent away for analysis to check for any infection which may need treatment. However, once the abscess is drained antibiotics are not usually needed.

This minor operation is usually carried out under a general anaesthetic. If the abscess is very small and the child is able to stay still and not get upset, it can sometimes be done under local anaesthetic where the area around the abscess is numbed.

Your child should be able to go home the same day,

## Risks

There are minimal risks with this surgery, the abscess may return if all the pus is not washed out, in which case the surgery may be needed again or more antibiotics will be needed.

## Aftercare advice following discharge

The following advice will help you care for your child at home after surgery:

- A certain amount of discomfort after the operation is normal. We would advise regular pain relief for the first 48 hours. On discharge we will discuss pain relief that can be given and what dose to give.
- The wound from the incision will heal by itself. There is usually no need for a follow-up appointment at the hospital.
- The dressing on the wound may need changing and/ or packing. A practice or community nurse will be asked to change the dressing if needed, either at your home or you may need to come back to the hospital. They will decide how often this will need to be done. It could be as often as every day at first. A drained abscess can take a few weeks to fully heal.

Sometimes you may need to come back to hospital for dressing changes which the community nurse will arrange. The nurse will let you know which option applies to your child. Your next dressing change will be:

Date: .....

Time: .....

Location: .....

By: .....

- The dressing should be kept dry. Your child can shower before they are due to have the dressing changed, so if it gets wet it can be changed shortly after by the nurse. You will know what time your appointment with the nurse is so you know when to have a shower.

### **What to expect with the wound:**

- Should heal by itself.
- Will have a certain amount of swelling.
- A small amount of oozing can be expected.
- It will look bright pink.

However, you should contact your GP or the ward for advice if the wound:

- starts to bleed.
- becomes red and angry and more painful to touch.
- starts to discharge pus.

### **Contact details**

Please contact Ward 10 on Tel: 0116 258 5362 if you need any advice or have any problems. You can also contact your GP for advice if needed.

If your child has no problems after surgery, they will not need to be seen again.

