



Necrotising fasciitis

This leaflet is for patients, relatives and visitors and explains what necrotising fasciitis is, its causes and how it is treated.

What is necrotising fasciitis?

Necrotising fasciitis is a serious soft-tissue infection of the skin. It is usually caused by a bacterium (germ) called *Streptococcus pyogenes* (also known as Group A Streptococcus). Unless treatment is started early, the infection could spread rapidly within the skin.

What are the symptoms?

Early symptoms include pain in the general area of an injury. The pain is usually more intense than you would expect from the injury sustained and gradually increases.

Other symptoms include flu-like symptoms such as fever and an intense thirst.

Advanced symptoms include swelling of the painful area with a rash and large dark blotches that turn into fluid filled blisters. Other symptoms include diarrhoea and vomiting.

How is it caught?

Streptococcus pyogenes can live normally within the throat or other areas of the body. Sometimes, wounds or small breaks in the skin can become contaminated with this bacterium, for example a surgical wound, a leg ulcer, an open fracture or a puncture site from a needle. There is then a possibility of an infection starting.

The bacteria may be spread by direct person to person contact through secretions from the mouth and throat or direct skin contact with individuals carrying the organism.

You may be more at risk of the infection if you have conditions such as diabetes, peripheral vascular disease, are immuno-suppressed (low resistance to disease) or abuse alcohol. However 50% of cases occur in young, previously healthy people.

What is the treatment?

The early signs and symptoms of necrotising fasciitis are not always easy to recognise so it is important that you visit your doctor urgently to rule out the infection if you are concerned.

A course of antibiotics will be given directly into the blood stream through a drip.

It will be necessary to surgically remove any area of bodily tissue that has been damaged by the infection.

Can it be passed to other people?

There is a small risk of passing this infection to others. To prevent the spread of infection to others you will be nursed in a side room. The people that provide direct care for you will wear

protective clothing, such as apron and gloves. It is important that thorough hand washing is carried out by all staff.

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions or concerns about necrotising fasciitis, please ask your nurse for further information or you can contact the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Infection Control team on 0118 322 6914, email: infection.control@royalberkshire.nhs.uk.

How do I find out more?

Thames Valley Health Protection Team Tel: 0344 225 3861 <https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>

United Kingdom Health Security Agency Website <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/necrotising-fasciitis-nf>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Simon Wells, RBFT Infection Prevention & Control, November 2024

Next review due: November 2026