

# Infective endocarditis

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**This leaflet explains what infective endocarditis is, how it can be prevented and how it is treated / managed.**

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## What is infective endocarditis?

Infective endocarditis is a rare but serious condition in which bacteria can settle on the lining of the heart, sometimes including a heart valve, and cause an infection. It is more likely to occur if the lining of the heart, the endocardium, is rough. This is likely to be where there is scarring from surgery or where there is turbulent blood flow, e.g. through a narrow valve; this makes it easier for the bacteria to settle there.

## What causes infective endocarditis?

Infective endocarditis is caused by certain types of bacteria that get into the bloodstream in large numbers. Once in the heart they attach to an area of endocardium that is rough and an infection develops.

## Preventing infective endocarditis

Although it isn't possible to stop all bacteria getting into the bloodstream there are a number of things that can be done to reduce the risk of getting endocarditis.

- **Good oral hygiene:** Problems such as gum disease and tooth decay can cause infective endocarditis; therefore, it is important to clean your teeth and mouth/ ideally twice a day using fluoride toothpaste; and go to the dentist for regular check-ups (every six months).
- **Body piercing and tattoos:** Avoid having body piercings and tattoos, as these have a high risk of infection.
- **Infections on the skin:** Antibiotics are recommended for infected cuts/grazes (not ones that are healing normally)/ infected eczema, infections around finger and toenails or chicken pox spots that become septic.

Until recently people at risk of infective endocarditis were offered antibiotics before certain dental and medical procedures. In March 2008 NICE (National Institute of Clinical Excellence) introduced new guidelines; they have looked at research about endocarditis which has shown that taking antibiotics to prevent endocarditis in these circumstances is not necessary. Following the introduction of these guidelines it is recommended that antibiotics are only given for these procedures if there is an active infection present in the area.

It is important that any medical, nursing or dental personnel treating your child are aware that he/she is at increased risk of infective endocarditis.

## Symptoms of infective endocarditis

Early symptoms may be flu-like, fever, tiredness, shivering and night sweats, breathlessness, weight loss and joint pain. If these symptoms continue for longer than a week then you should see your GP or contact the hospital. It is important to get early diagnosis and treatment for this condition.

## Treatment of infective endocarditis

Infective endocarditis is usually treated successfully by a long course (usually 6 weeks) of intravenous antibiotics in hospital. However, surgery may be needed if the infection does not respond to treatment and a valve is damaged.

## Contacting us

If you have any worries or concerns, please contact:

Clinical Admin Team (CAT 7) Monday – Friday 9am-5pm Tel: 0118 322 7531 option 2 or email [rbb-tr.cat7@nhs.net](mailto:rbb-tr.cat7@nhs.net)

Alternatively, contact your GP or NHS 111 who can, if necessary, urgently refer to the Paediatric Team at Royal Berkshire Hospital.

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

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

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