

Subacute bacterial endocarditis: Prophylaxis

What is subacute bacterial endocarditis?

Subacute bacterial endocarditis (sub-ah-cute back-**teer**-ee-al en-doe-car-**dye**-tis) is an infection of the inner lining of the heart and the heart valves. It is very serious because it can cause destruction of the heart tissue. It is often called SBE, or simply “endocarditis.”

Bacteria (germs) that cause SBE can get into the bloodstream during dental treatment or surgery of the upper respiratory system. Germs can also enter the body through unhealthy, inflamed gums, especially if they bleed. Once bacteria get into the bloodstream, they can reach the heart. If your child has a heart defect or has had heart surgery, there is a small but real risk that the bacteria will cause endocarditis.

The treatment for endocarditis is hospitalization and up to 6 weeks of intravenous (IV) antibiotics. Sometimes surgery is needed to remove bacteria and/or repair damage caused to the heart.

What are the signs of SBE?

- unexplained fever
- night sweats
- poor appetite
- muscle and joint aches
- no energy
- weight loss
- back or chest pain
- unusual rashes

If you think your child may have endocarditis, call the doctor **right away**.

How can I prevent SBE?

With proper precautions, the chances of getting SBE are less than 1%. SBE prophylaxis (prevention) involves two major aspects: good dental care for all patients, and antibiotic protection for patients with the following conditions:

- congenital heart disease (CHD)
- cyanotic congenital heart disease (unrepaired)
- congenital heart defect that has been repaired with a patch or device (for the first 6 months after the procedure)
- congenital heart defect that has been repaired with a patch or device, with residual defects near or at the site
- cardiac transplant patients who develop cardiac valve problems
- prosthetic cardiac valve
- history of having endocarditis

Dental care

Keep the teeth and gums clean and healthy. This will prevent germs from entering the bloodstream through inflamed tissue and will prevent the need for most dental repairs or dental surgery.

Your child should begin seeing a dentist for regular check ups by the first birthday. Tell the dentist about your child’s heart condition.

Clean your infant's teeth from the time the first tooth comes in. Start teaching your child to brush by 3 years of age. Start flossing when the spaces between the teeth are closed. Ask your dentist to show you how to floss your child's teeth.

For children younger than 9 years, parents should help with the brushing and flossing.

Antibiotic protection

For at risk patient, it is important to take a prescribed antibiotic before procedures that may allow bacteria to enter the bloodstream. For dental, oral, or respiratory system procedures, amoxicillin is recommended by the American Heart Association. If allergic to amoxicillin or penicillin, other antibiotics will be prescribed.

When scheduled for one of the following procedures, call the clinic for a prescription to give before the procedure:

- routine dental appointments and teeth cleaning
- getting braces put on
- tooth extraction
- cuts in the mouth that need stitches
- tonsillectomy or adenoidectomy
- incision and drainage of infected tissue
- bronchoscopy to remove objects in the lungs

Please call **at least 2** days before the procedure. When you call, be ready to give the following information:

- child's name
- child's current weight (needed to calculate the correct dose)
- preferred preparation: liquid, chewable tablets, or pills to swallow
- any allergies to medicines
- the pharmacy name and phone number
- your name and phone number

Examples of when antibiotics are **not** needed include:

- minor adjustments of braces, when bleeding is not likely
- losing baby teeth
- cuts, scratches, and stitches in areas outside the mouth
- ear tube surgery for uninfected ears
- cardiac catheterization

Some people ask if they need antibiotics before body piercing or tattooing. Published studies haven't defined the risk, but several doctors report having seen cases of endocarditis after body piercing and/or tattooing. If you choose to have these done, your doctor may advise taking antibiotics to lessen the risk of endocarditis. Make sure your skin is **very** clean beforehand.

After the procedure, if you see redness, swelling, or drainage, call your doctor right away.

When should I call the cardiology clinic?

Call if your child is scheduled for a procedure and you do not know whether antibiotics are needed.

Questions?

This sheet is not specific to your child, but provides general information. If you have any questions, please call the clinic.

For more reading material about this and other health topics, please call or visit the Family Resource Center library, or visit our Web site: childrensMN.org.