

# Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines for Anesthesia Care

## Chapter XX: Role of the CRNA in Reducing Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia and Surgical Site Infection

### Introduction

Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia (VAP) and Surgical Site Infection (SSI) are two significant healthcare-associated infections (HAIs) that can lead to increased morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs. There are other HAIs that may pose a risk to patients, this chapter will focus on VAP and SSI as these infections are ones that anesthesia providers can directly mitigate. The following section outlines key prevention strategies for anesthesia professionals to mitigate the risk of these adverse events.

### Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to outline key prevention strategies for anesthesia professionals to mitigate the risk of VAP and SSI.

### Audience

This resource is intended for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs), also known as nurse anesthesiologists or nurse anesthetists, resident registered nurse anesthetists, other anesthesia providers, members of the interdisciplinary team, administrators involved in policy developed and implementation, quality assurance professionals, and other interested stakeholders.

### Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia

VAP is hospital-acquired pneumonia that develops 48 hours or longer in patients who have been mechanically ventilated by endotracheal tube (ETT) or tracheostomy.<sup>1-3</sup> VAP is reported to affect 5 to 40% of patients receiving invasive mechanical ventilation for more than 2 days, with large variations depending upon the country, ICU type, and criteria used to identify VAP.<sup>1,2</sup>

VAP is a serious healthcare-associated infection that can lead to significant morbidity, mortality, and increased healthcare costs.<sup>4-9</sup> Clinical signs of VAP include purulent tracheal discharge, fevers, and respiratory distress in the presence of microorganisms.<sup>10</sup> Studies have attempted to quantify the economic burden of VAP and have reported costs ranging from \$10,000 to \$40,000 per patient treated.<sup>4,5,7-9</sup>

Implementing the following ventilator bundle compliance prevention strategies may reduce the burden of VAP and improve patient outcomes.<sup>2,11-22</sup>

- Practice hand hygiene before and after patient care.
- Use noninvasive ventilation when possible to avoid intubation and associated risks.
- Extubate as early as possible to minimize duration of invasive ventilation.
- Prevent aspiration by:
  - Maintaining semirecumbent position (30-40 degrees) if possible.
  - Avoiding gastric overdistention.
  - Avoiding unplanned extubation and reintubation.
  - Using cuffed endotracheal tubes with subglottic suctioning.
  - Maintaining cuff pressure of  $\geq 20$ cm H<sub>2</sub>O.
- Avoid nasotracheal intubation.
- Avoid acid suppressive therapy (i.e., H<sub>2</sub> blockers, proton pump inhibitors), if possible, due to risk increases bacterial colonization of the aerodigestive tract. If clinically indicated, use the lowest possible dose and duration of acid suppressive therapy to reduce risk of bacterial colonization.
- Perform regular oral care with an antiseptic solution.
- Eliminate potential contamination risk to equipment:

- Using sterile water to rinse reusable equipment.
- Removing condensate from ventilator circuits.
- Changing circuits only when visibly soiled.
- Using sterile suction catheters.

## **Surgical Site Infection**

SSI is an infection occurring at or near the surgical site within 30 days of the surgical procedure or within 90 days of implantation of prosthetic materials.<sup>23</sup> SSIs can be classified as superficial or deep, involving tissues beneath the skin, surrounding organs, or implanted materials.<sup>23</sup> SSIs can be caused by a myriad of bacteria, including the patient's own endogenous flora. SSIs are costly and pose a risk to patient safety. SSIs account for 20% or more of all HAIs and affect up to 3% of all surgical patients, with variation based on type of surgery, patient co-morbidities, length of operation, increasing mortality 2- to 10-fold.<sup>24-29</sup> SSIs are the most costly HAI with an estimated annual cost of \$3.3 billion, and extend hospital length of stay by 9.7 days, with cost of hospitalization increased by more than \$20,000 per admission.<sup>7,26,27,29</sup>

It is estimated that over half of SSIs are preventable by the use of evidence-based measures.<sup>30</sup> CRNAs can play an active role in SSI mitigation by deploying an SSI prevention bundle, which includes performing enhanced SSI surveillance to determine the source, extent, and potential solutions to the problem.

## **Hand Hygiene**

Hand hygiene interrupts the transmission of pathogens between healthcare providers, patients, and contaminated surfaces/fomites in the patient's environment.<sup>31-34</sup> While studies demonstrate that hand hygiene plays an important role in reducing healthcare acquired

infections, compliance rates among anesthesia professionals is poor.<sup>32,35-37</sup> Strategic placement of alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers near the anesthesia work area is recommended to improve hand hygiene compliance and facilitate SSI prevention.<sup>38,39</sup>

#### *Equipment and Environment Cleaning*

Cross-transmission of bacteria can occur in the anesthesia work area on surfaces like equipment (e.g., IV poles), anesthesia carts, anesthesia machines, and computers.<sup>34,40,41</sup> Proper cleaning, disinfection, and sterilization, as appropriate, of anesthesia equipment and the anesthesia machine are important to prevent SSIs.<sup>40,41</sup> Recommended precautions include:

- Cleaning and then disinfecting anesthesia machine surfaces, knobs, and high-touch areas like keyboards between cases and at the end of the day with an appropriate germicide.
- Taking protective measures to prevent contamination of materials stored on the anesthesia machine from becoming inadvertently contaminated by airborne debris (e.g., blood).<sup>40</sup>

#### *Maintenance of Normothermia*

Perioperative hypothermia is defined as the reduction in body temperature to less than 36°C in the perioperative period.<sup>42</sup> Prevention of intraoperative hypothermia has been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of SSIs.<sup>43-45</sup> Hypothermia triggers vasoconstriction and tissue hypoxia, which can impair wound healing and increase SSI risk.<sup>43</sup> Hypothermia can also impair the function of neutrophils, further reducing the body's protection against infection.<sup>46,47</sup>

CRNAs should maintain normothermia for the patient during surgery.<sup>43-45</sup> The method of maintaining normothermia is patient and procedure dependent, and may include passive warming measures (e.g., blankets, surgical drapes) or active warming measures (e.g. forced air warming devices, underbody warming mattresses, fluid warmers for intravenous and irrigation fluids, radiant warmers). There continues to be debate regarding forced air warming and its relationship to SSIs, therefore each anesthesia professional must determine what is more appropriate for their patient and follow relevant facility policies and protocols for patient warming.<sup>48-66</sup>

Document measures taken to maintain patient normothermia, including the warming method used, warming device identifier, and temperature settings when applicable.<sup>67</sup>

### *Strict Glycemic Control*

Hyperglycemia is associated with a higher risk of developing SSIs.<sup>44,68-70</sup> Surgical stress triggers the release cortisol, leading to hyperglycemia and insulin resistance.<sup>70</sup>

Hyperglycemia impairs neutrophil function and immune response, increasing susceptibility to infections.<sup>71,72</sup> During the perioperative period, short-term strict glycemic control has been shown to be more important than long-term glycemic management in reducing SSI risk.<sup>27,68-</sup>

<sup>70,73</sup> Recommendations range from blood glucose levels less than 200 mg/dL to as low as 110-150 mg/dL.<sup>27,30,68-71,74-76</sup> For cardiac patients, the target is less than 180 mg/dL or lower.<sup>71,77-79</sup>

More information about perioperative glycemic control can be found in the AANA [Enhanced Recovery After Surgery, Considerations for Pathway Development and Implementation](#).

*Fluid Management – Normovolemia*

Perioperative fluid therapy helps maintain adequate tissue perfusion and oxygenation, which is important for wound healing and preventing SSIs.<sup>71,80,81</sup> Both hypovolemia and hypervolemia can impair wound healing and increase SSI risk.<sup>80-83</sup> Specifically, hypovolemia can cause vasoconstriction and a reduction in perfusion, resulting in decreased oxygen delivery to organs and peripheral tissues.<sup>80,81,84</sup> Hypervolemia results in tissue edema, local inflammation, and impaired collagen synthesis, which can lead to infection and wound dehiscence.<sup>80,81,84</sup> Current recommendations include adherence to goal-directed fluid therapy protocols rather than standard fluid management calculations.<sup>81,83</sup>

*Perioperative Antibiotic Administration*

Optimizing perioperative antimicrobial dosing, timing, and selection of the appropriate antibiotic agent typically fall under the anesthesia professional's responsibilities.<sup>85</sup> Most guidelines recommend administering prophylactic antibiotics within 60 minutes prior to surgical incision and 120 minutes prior to incision for antibiotics like vancomycin and fluoroquinolones that have longer infusion times.<sup>86-89</sup> Studies suggest administering cephalosporin antibiotics (e.g., cefazolin)  $\leq 30$  minutes prior to incision, which may be more effective in reducing SSI risk compared to the 60 minutes prior.<sup>86,88,89</sup>

*Blood Loss Prevention*

Blood transfusions have been associated with an increased risk of developing SSIs due to their immunosuppressive effects.<sup>74,90</sup> It is important for anesthesia providers to take steps to reduce the need for transfusion. However, blood products should never be withheld if clinically indicated, as inadequate tissue oxygenation from undertransfusion can also impair wound healing and increase infection risk.<sup>74,90</sup>

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390 The *Infection Control Guide for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists* was adopted by the AANA Board of Directors  
391 in 1992 and revised in 1993, 1997, November 2012. In February 2015, the AANA Board of Directors archived the  
392 guide and adopted the *Infection Prevention and Control Guidelines for Anesthesia Care*.

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