



HSE AMRIC

Standardised Guide for Surgical Site Infection Nurses

Supporting the Implementation of the AMRIC Surgical Site Infection Prevention Programme

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Health Service Executive (HSE) AMRIC

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Introduction

Surgical site infection (SSI) is the third most common healthcare-associated infection (HCAI) accounting for 13.6% of all HCAIs in Ireland. The majority of reported SSI cases are deep incisional or organ/ space SSI, with the true burden of SSI likely underestimated for superficial incisional SSI, as many are diagnosed and managed post-discharge¹.

Surgical site infections are associated with longer length of hospital stays for affected patients, additional surgical procedures or treatment in intensive care units, and greater rates of morbidity and mortality¹.

Background

The national AMRIC team established a programme for prevention of surgical site infection as part of the implementation of Ireland's National Action Plan 2 (INAP 2)² HSE AMRICs action plan 2022-2025³.

The objectives for implementing a national surgical site infection prevention programme include:

1. To measure the national incidence of SSI and monitor changes in infection rates
2. To develop national preventative strategies for SSI
3. To improve patient outcomes by ensuring standardised measurement locally, with timely and accurate feedback leading to improvement initiatives and reduced infection rates.
4. To standardise SSI surveillance practices nationally, to support consistent and comparable data collection
5. To benchmark between facilities with opportunities to learn from those with low rates and to motivate and support teams to reduce rates of SSI by implementing evidence-based change to surgical care
6. To support implementation of Ireland's National Action Plans (iNAPs) on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and the HSE AMRIC Action plans
7. To comply with ECDC protocol for reporting of surgical site infection surveillance

This programme commenced in 2022 on a phased programme of work with 1 pilot project focused on SSI surveillance of post hip fracture surgery and this was then implemented more widely in 2023.

To develop capacity for prevention of surgical site infection surveillance within regions, and with a view to expansion of SSI prevention to other surgeries, the National AMRIC team and HSE Acute Operations funded regional/ group SSI CNM2 nursing posts.

Planning to expand the programme to Caesarean-Section (C-Section) surgery was undertaken in line with governance of the HSE AMRIC action plans 2022-2025³ and 2026-2030⁴ and continues to be aligned to iNAP3 2026-2030⁵.

The HSE AMRIC action plan 2026-2030 ⁴ has set out several key action areas to support development of an SSI prevention programme (Table 1). At a national level, there is a focus on data for action, developing national system to collect data focused on SSI. At service level across each health region, the focus is on collation and submission of data and implementation of quality improvement programmes to reduce SSI.

Strategic objective 2: enhance surveillance of antibiotic resistance and antibiotic use	
Regional actions	National coordination and supports
Support regional/local quality improvement SSI projects supported by appropriate governance.	Develop national system for collection of SSI surveillance data.
Monitor and report incidence of SSIs in line with national SSI surveillance programme.	Expand SSI surveillance programme in line with highest risk.
Implement the position statement on duration of surgical antibiotic prophylaxis (SAP).	Reporting risk-adjusted SSI rates to support SSI surveillance programme.
Deliver quality improvement programmes to reduce SSIs.	Evaluate the SSI surveillance programme.
	Support quality improvement programmes to reduce SSIs.

Table 1: Extract from HSE AMRIC Action plan 2026- 2030 (Strategic Objective 2)

Programme structure and governance

The national SSI prevention programme governance structure has been aligned to support expansion of the programme to include C-section surgery and additional surgeries in the future. The programme governance is set out in in the Framework for HSE AMRIC National Programme for Prevention of Surgical Site Infections.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to guide, support and assist SSI nurses in standardising their approach in establishing and/or implementing the national surgical site infection prevention programme within their regional health authority (RHA), and outlines recommendations for SSI nurses on areas to focus their practice, in supporting the implementation of this programme.

It is important to acknowledge that the sustainability of SSI surveillance is dependent on ownership at regional level. This document may also be used as a reference document to support senior management such as integrated healthcare area (IHA) managers, hospital chief executive officers (CEOs) and hospital managers, risk management and quality and patient safety managers, senior nursing management, surgeons and other clinicians involved in implementing the national prevention of surgical site infection programme within their RHA.

Scope

This document outlines:

1. suggested areas of practice for SSI nurses to support in establishing and/ or implementing the national SSI prevention programme
2. guidance and resources to support the national SSI prevention programme

This document is not intended to describe job specification requirements as set out by national or local HR departments or set out roles and responsibilities for SSI nurses, rather a guide to support SSI nurses in establishing and/ or implementing the national prevention of surgical site infection programme within their RHA.

Target Audience

The target audience is SSI nurses involved in the national SSI prevention programme. This document may also be used as a reference document to support management involved in implementation of the national SSI prevention programme at regional level.

Suggested areas of practice for SSI nurses to support establishing and/or implementing surgical site infection prevention programme

Governance and committee involvement

1. Work within an established robust governance structure with defined reporting structures in place in accordance with local nursing and clinical governance structures
2. Contribute to the establishment of (if not already established)/ or have membership of local/ regional SSI prevention implementation groups or steering committee(s) as per local governance arrangements
3. Participate in committees pertaining to prevention of healthcare associated infections (HCAIs) including SSI such as local/ regional integrated infection prevention and control and antimicrobial stewardship (IPC/ AMS) committees and any associated committees undertaking SSI surveillance, for example local hip fracture governance committee
4. Support and contribute to the data analysis and reports on local and regional SSI data and initiatives as per local governance arrangements as appropriate through governance structures
5. Escalate any issues as per local governance arrangements as appropriate

Surveillance and data collection

1. Coordinate and support SSI prevention programmes at hospital/ regional level
2. Undertake/partake in a gap analysis of regional response to national SSI prevention programme and provide feedback to IHA/ RHA governance structures
3. Participate and support the overall development and progression of SSI surveillance projects in terms of the project plan, timeframes, objectives, outcomes and key milestones, considering specific patient cohorts/ surgeries, standardised data collection methods and tools, surveillance protocols, SSI reporting, post discharge follow up
4. Support the implementation of post discharge surveillance methods (30 days post op and 90 days post prosthetic implant).

Education and training

1. Lead, participate and support the implementation of best practice guidance related to prevention of surgical site infections and tools to aid implementation, for example such as SSI care bundles in partnership with key stakeholders at local levels, including infection prevention and control (IPC) team, antimicrobial stewardship team and nursing practice development units
2. Lead on education on SSI prevention and in sharing results of SSI surveillance, audits and quality improvement initiatives. This should include (but not limited to) engagement with theatre staff, (including audits of procedures in the operating theatre if agreed locally), surgical colleagues, anaesthetic colleagues and surgical nursing staff.

Quality improvement & audit

1. Lead, participate and support SSI prevention quality improvement (QI) initiatives, with multidisciplinary team collaboration where appropriate, and following QI methodologies for example Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles
2. Collaborate with other members of the SSI prevention implementation groups (local/regional) for example antimicrobial pharmacists, IPC team members, surveillance scientists, clinical microbiologists, surgical and theatre colleagues in each hospital in the RHA
3. Participate and support the roll out of future SSI surveillance quality improvement related projects, as deemed appropriate by the SSI prevention steering group committee.

Incident Management

1. Adhere to HSE Incident Management framework
2. Participate in SSI related HCAI reviews, through use of review tools where clinically indicated and in accordance with HSE national incident management framework.

Membership of the National SSI nurses working group

1. Participate in the national SSI prevention subcommittees and AMRIC SSI nurses working group supporting the national SSI prevention programme
2. Assist with implementation of overarching SSI prevention programme evaluations and/or audits as per national SSI prevention steering committee and AMRIC Clinical Lead
3. Engage with other SSI nurses nationally to share learnings, exchange knowledge, highlight success stories and promote best practice.

Guidance and resources to support the surgical site infection prevention programme.

Surgical Antibiotic Prophylaxis

A joint position statement on surgical antibiotic prophylaxis duration was developed by the HSE Antimicrobial Resistance and Infection Control Team (AMRIC), the HSE Antimicrobial Stewardship Advisory Group & the National Clinical Programme for Surgery (NCPS).

The position statement and a suite of resources to support the implementation are available on [antibioticprescribing.ie<acute hospital guidelines<surgical antibiotic prophylaxis](https://antibioticprescribing.ie/acute-hospital-guidelines/surgical-antibiotic-prophylaxis).

The resources include:

1. An audit tool for quality improvement projects, including an embedded video demonstrating how to use the tool within the Excel file
2. Surgical antibiotic prophylaxis poster highlighting key messages
3. Patient information leaflet entitled “Antibiotics before an operation to reduce risk of infection”
4. A PowerPoint presentation on the topic of surgical antibiotic prophylaxis appropriate duration
5. PowerPoint slides of webinars on the topic of surgical antibiotic prophylaxis
6. Reports including:
7. National Antimicrobial Targeted Point Prevalence Survey for Surgical Antibiotic Prophylaxis Report (2025)
8. Surgical antibiotic prophylaxis report from Antimicrobial Point Prevalence Survey in Acute Hospitals in Ireland (2024)

Both the poster and patient information leaflet can be ordered from www.healthpromotion.ie

An eLearning module on all aspects of surgical antibiotic prophylaxis including “the right duration” is available on HSeLanD aimed at anyone who prescribes, dispenses or administers surgical antibiotic prophylaxis.

SSI Guidance

To support the progress with a national surveillance system the prevention of surgical site infection guidance was reviewed, updated and published in December 2024, providing key recommendations to prevent SSI, available on www.hpsc.ie.

Patient information leaflet

The patient information leaflet provides the patient with information about surgical site infections or surgical wound infections, and how patients can help reduce the risk of getting an infection, and what your nurses and doctors will do to reduce that risk, available on www.hpsc.ie.

Framework for HSE AMRIC National Programme for Surgical Site Infection Prevention

This framework document has been reviewed and updated to include the HSE AMRIC programme for SSI prevention, the expansion of the national programme to surveillance and SSI prevention in other surgeries and the supporting governance arrangements, available on www.hpsc.ie.

References

- [1] European Centre for Disease Control, “Point prevalence survey of healthcare associated infections and antimicrobial use in European acute care hospitals.,” ECDC, Stockholm, 2024.
- [2] Government of Ireland, “Ireland’s One Health National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2021 –2025 (known as iNAP2). <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d72f1-joint-action-on-antimicrobial-resistance/www.gov.ie/amr>,” Government of Ireland, 2021.
- [3] Health Service Executive, “Health Service Executive 2022-2025 AMRIC Action Plan <https://bit.ly/3nWROS7>,” Health Service Executive, 2021.
- [4] Health Service Executive, “AMRIC action plan 2026-2030 <https://bit.ly/AMRactionplan>,” 2025.
- [5] Government of Ireland, “Ireland’s Third One Health National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2026 – 2030 (known as iNAP3). <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d72f1-joint-action-on-antimicrobial-resistance/>,” Government of Ireland, 2025.