**Splenectomy**

**Caring for your child after surgery**

**What is the spleen?**

The spleen is an organ near the stomach. It helps to remove germs, like bacteria, from the blood stream. It helps the body fight against certain kinds of infections. The spleen also stores blood and removes old or damaged blood cells from the blood stream.

**What is a splenectomy?**

A splenectomy is a surgery to take out the spleen. The most common reason to remove the spleen is to treat blood diseases or types of anemia. Removing the spleen can increase the number of blood cells. A spleen is also removed after an injury like a car accident. Trauma or certain illnesses can cause damage to the spleen.

**How will my child live without a spleen?**

Your child can live well without a spleen. But without a spleen, your child may be more likely to get certain types of infections. It is important for you to learn about the signs of infection in your child. That way, you can prevent these infections and know when to get medical treatment.

Fever is the most important sign of infection to watch for. What to do about a fever is described in a later section called “What special care will my child need without a spleen?”

**How do I prepare my child before surgery?**

Your child will need to have their immunization shots before the surgery. They help protect against some infections. The shots are usually given at least several weeks before surgery. Your medical team will discuss with you which shots your child needs.

The ones most often needed are:

- **Hib (haemophilus influenza type B) vaccine.** This is a series of 4 shots. This series is given as part of the routine childhood immunization schedule to all babies at ages 2, 4, 6 and 12 months. Most children older than one year have already finished this set of shots.

- **Meningococcal vaccine.** This is a single shot. It is not a part of the routine childhood immunization schedule. A booster is needed every 3 to 5 years after the first shot.

- **Pneumococcal vaccine.** Infants usually get 4 doses of these shots as part of their regular childhood immunizations. Your medical team will recommend the best plan for your child. A booster shot is needed after 5 years.
It is important to keep a record of your child’s shots. Be sure to add the ones your child gets for the splenectomy to your child’s regular immunization card. There is also a section at the end of this flyer for listing the shots.

**What can I expect after surgery?**

Your child will need to stay in the hospital for 1 to 2 nights for a total splenectomy and 2 to 5 nights for a partial splenectomy.

In the hospital your child will:
- Receive pain medicine for comfort.
- Be asked to cough, take deep breaths and move around to help lungs expand.
- Have liquids at first only through the IV (intravenous) in their vein, then slowly start to drink clear liquids. Once your child does OK with liquids, food will be restarted slowly.
- Have one or more incisions covered with small bandages. The stitches are inside, will dissolve on their own, and do not need to be removed. Most times there is no special care needed for the incision.

**Will my child be in pain?**

We partner with you and your child to prevent and relieve pain as completely as possible. You know your child best. We encourage you to take an active part in your child’s recovery by talking with your care team about options for your child. After a surgery your child is likely to have some pain and discomfort. In addition to medicine prescribed for pain, we will work with you to create a plan that encourages coping activities to treat pain and provide support. No matter the level of your child’s pain, we join you to assess and respond right away. Help your child get better, faster with good pain management.

**How do I care for my child at home?**

Once your child is eating and drinking, is comfortable and there are no signs of infection, your child may go home.

**Diet**

Your child can eat normally at home.

**Incision**

- Keep incision clean and dry.
- Check the incision at least once a day for drainage or redness.

**Activity**

Ask your child’s surgeon about specific activity restrictions for your child. Your child can return to normal activities one week after a total splenectomy. If your child has a partial splenectomy no contact sports are allowed for 4 weeks.
**Medicine**
Take medicines as directed by your healthcare provider. Your child may need a mild pain medicine and will need to have antibiotics on hand. Some children will need to take routine antibiotics after surgery for a year or longer.

**Follow-up**
Your child should see the surgeon in the General Surgery Clinic 3 to 4 weeks after going home. Most children will need a blood test for their platelet count at that time as well as an ultrasound if they had a partial splenectomy.

Long term follow up will continue in the Cancer and Blood Disorders Center for all children. We will also see your child in surgery clinic for routine follow up if they had a partial splenectomy.

**When should I call the doctor?**
Please call the doctor if your child has:

- A fever of 101.5° F or higher
- Vomiting
- Redness that spreads from the incision site
- New bleeding or drainage from the incision site
- Severe, constant pain at the surgery site that does not get better with prescribed pain medicine

**What special care will my child need without a spleen?**

*After the spleen is removed, your child may be more likely to get certain types of serious infections.* Follow these guidelines about antibiotics, fever, MedicAlert jewelry and immunizations.

**Antibiotics**
You will get a prescription for antibiotics for your child. They may need to take the medicine every day. Always keep a supply of antibiotics at home to give to your child as directed. Make sure you understand the plan for giving the antibiotics to your child. Be sure that all medicines are stored as written on the bottle. Your medical team will review your child's condition and make a plan for taking the antibiotics.

The plan for your child is:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
To Learn More
- General Surgery 206-987-2794
- Your child’s healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services
- In the hospital, ask your child’s nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Fever
Follow these steps:

1. **If your child has a fever of 101.5 F (38.9 C) or higher take them to a doctor right away.** Do this every time the fever happens. Your child must see a doctor in the office or the emergency room right away.

   **If your child passes out with a fever or gets a rash with a fever, even if the fever is lower than 101.5F, take them to the doctor right away. Do not wait for the next day.** Your child will need to have blood tests and possibly stay in the hospital.

2. Give a dose of the antibiotic quickly for a fever of 101.5 F (38.9 C) or higher.

Wear a MedicAlert bracelet
Be sure to have your child wear a MedicAlert bracelet or necklace. This will alert any healthcare provider in an emergency that your child had their spleen removed. Your surgical team will give you information on how to get these bracelets. Go to www.medicalert.com for more information.

Keep up to date on all immunizations
Keep up with your child’s routine immunization schedule. Also, the extra immunizations your child got before surgery will have to be updated with booster shots.

Be sure your child gets the yearly **flu shot**. Talk to your child’s primary care provider about these immunizations.

The list below shows the immunizations your child needs because of splenectomy. The dates they were given are listed along with the dates they need to be updated with a booster shot.

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<tr>
<th>Immunization</th>
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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s healthcare provider.