

Emergency Department Abscess (Boil)

General Information

An abscess (also called a boil) is an infection under the skin that causes a painful, pus-filled lump. An abscess happens when bacteria infect a hair follicle (a sac under the skin where hair starts to grow). Abscesses usually happen on the back of the neck, face, armpits, and buttocks; but, they can happen anywhere hair grows on the body. Abscesses usually start out small and grow big quickly; they usually get more painful as they get bigger.

In order for an abscess to heal it needs to be open so that the pus can drain out, the doctor will ensure it is open before you leave the emergency. Antibiotics are not required for most patients with abscesses.

Instructions

1. You should leave your abscess covered with a bandage while it heals to keep it clean and catch the pus as it drains. Keep the bandage clean and dry.
2. After 24 hours you may change the bandage. If the bandage is stuck to the wound use warm water to soak it off. You should gently clean around the wound with warm water and soap before applying a new bandage.
3. Change your bandage daily until the abscess is healed.

See your Family Doctor if any of the following develop:

- Increased temperature or fever.
- The wound is no longer open or draining, and is increasing in pain and size again.

For more information or questions contact HealthLinkBC at 811.

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