

Understanding Septic Arthritis

At least 20,000 cases of Septic arthritis occur in the United States every year.

1 Introduction

Septic arthritis is an infection in the joint fluid and tissues. This infection can come from germs that travel through the bloodstream from another part of the body. Septic arthritis can also occur when a penetrating injury, such as an animal bite or trauma, delivers germs directly to the joint. Septic arthritis usually only affects one joint, typically a large one such as the knee, hip or shoulder. This infection is more likely to occur in children, older adults or those who use illegal drugs.

2 Causes

Septic arthritis can develop when bacterial, viral or fungal infect the joint. Staphylococcus aureus (staph) is the most common type of bacteria to cause this infection. Some ways for bacteria to enter the body are:

- An open fracture
- An infected wound
- An infection that spreads from another place on the body
- Foreign object entering the skin

3 Symptoms

Symptoms can vary depending on age and the medications being taken. Symptoms may include:

- Severe pain that worsens with movement
- Swelling of the joint
- Warmth and redness around the joint
- Fever or chills

4 Treatments

Treatments include a combination of powerful antibiotics and draining the infected synovial fluid from the joint. Antibiotics are typically the first step in treatment to kill the bacteria causing infection. This can begin to improve symptoms within 48 hours. Removing the infected fluid from the joint is crucial and there are a few different methods:

- Needle
- Scope procedure
- Open surgery

In the event that an artificial joint is infected, treatment often involves removing the joint and temporarily replacing it with a joint spacer. Several months later a new joint can be implanted.

Did you know?

Research shows that at least 1/3 of people who develop Septic Arthritis will become ill.

For more information on Septic Arthritis and supportive resources, please visit www.mayoclinic.org

References:

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