



## **Health and Safety Alert – Urinary Tract Infections**

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are among the most common type of infections. UTIs occur when bacteria, often from the skin or rectum, enter the urethra, and infect the urinary tract. The infections can affect several parts of the urinary tract, but the most common type is a bladder infection. When UTIs are left untreated the infection can spread and cause sepsis which can ultimately lead to death.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)**

- Dysuria (painful or difficult urination)
- Strong urinary odor
- Fever
- Frequent and urgent urination (may feel the need to urinate, even after emptying the bladder)
- Nocturia (excessive urination at night)
- Hematuria (the presence of blood in the urine)
- Malaise (feeling ill or weak)
- Lower abdominal pressure, pain or cramping, lower back pain or side pain
- Urinary incontinence (sudden onset)
- Lack or loss of appetite
- New or worsening mental confusion
- Irritability and agitation
- Chills
- Nausea or vomiting

Individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) are at a higher risk for UTIs than the general population. Individuals with profound or severe I/DD who are nonverbal or have physical disabilities or incontinence, are at greater risk to get a UTI.

If an individual cannot communicate or describe the discomfort they may be experiencing, they are dependent on caregivers to recognize the signs and symptoms of a UTI. Individuals with I/DD may exhibit the following symptoms:

- An elevated temperature (often the first sign of a UTI in an individual who is non-verbal)
- Grabbing, pulling, or holding their genitals or perianal area (more than usual or sudden onset)
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Listlessness or tiredness
- Increased irritability and agitation related to toileting or urinating (squirming, wiggling, grimacing, whining, crying, stiffening legs, etc.)
- Sudden changes in behavior, such as an increase or onset of irritability or aggressive behaviors
- Sudden confusion, for example, not able to do tasks that were easily completed a day or two before
- Worsening of dementia symptoms for those with Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, or other dementias
- Refusal to eat or drink and/or poor appetite
- Frequent trips to the bathroom or trying to avoid urinating
- New onset of bowel or urinary incontinence

### **Risk Factors for a UTI**

- UTIs are more common in females than males (the female urethra is shorter and closer to the rectum, where more bacteria exist and can easily travel into the urinary tract)
- A history of a prior UTI puts an individual at a higher risk for acquiring another
- For females, having a female relative with a history of UTIs increases their risk
- Individuals with any type of incontinence or urinary retention who have recurrent hospitalizations or reside in a congregate living environment are at higher risk for a UTI
- A diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes, coupled with bladder nerve damage (neuropathy), puts an individual at much higher risk for a UTI, because the bladder may not empty completely
- Changes in the bacteria that live inside the vagina, or vaginal flora (menopause or the use of spermicides can cause changes in the vaginal flora)
- Pregnancy
- Age (older adults and young children are more likely to get UTIs)
- Structural problems in the urinary tract, such as an enlarged prostate
- Poor hygiene

### **Lowering the Risk for Getting a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)**

- Educating individuals and direct support staff regarding proper perianal hygiene is one of the most effective ways of reducing the risk
- Staying well hydrated to flush the bacteria from the body when urinating
- Drinking adequate amounts of non-caffeinated fluids to assist the bladder muscles to remain firm and healthy and better evacuate the urine from the body
- Performing proper catheter care regularly and as prescribed by a physician, and maintaining scheduled replacement appointments for individuals with indwelling, urinary, or suprapubic catheters
- Reviewing the health care needs of individuals requiring indwelling catheters regularly to determine whether a treatment change to periodic straight catheterization may be the best way to reduce the risk of a UTI

### **Treatment for Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)**

A physician will determine if an individual has a UTI by:

- Asking about symptoms
- Performing a physical exam
- Ordering urine tests, if needed

Bacteria can cause UTIs, and antibiotics treat them. However, antibiotics can cause side effects, including:

- Rash
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Yeast infections

More serious side effects include antibiotic resistant infections causing severe diarrhea that can lead to colon damage and death.

The RN should be notified when any side effects are noted.

### **Prevention of Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)**

It is important that individuals who are susceptible to UTIs maintain consistent hydration.

Some suggested methods of hydration include:

- Offer drinks regularly and before an individual becomes thirsty (an early indicator of dehydration)
- Offer drinks in between meals and at mealtime
- Offer drinks regularly to individuals that are dependent on staff for fluids
- Offer drinks regularly to individuals prescribed psychotropic medications or laxatives, (e.g., MiraLAX, Docusate), as they may require additional fluids
- Encourage individuals to drink 8-10 glasses of fluid daily and offer foods high in fluid content, (e.g., watermelon, strawberries, broccoli)

### **Plan of Nursing Service (PONS) for Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)**

If an individual is diagnosed with a UTI and is being treated with an antibiotic or other medication, the Registered Nurse (RN) must put a PONS in place. The PONS provides the direct support staff with information on what to expect while the individual is recovering from the UTI, what actions to take, what symptoms to look for, and when to report concerns to the RN. It is very important that the direct support staff are trained on the PONS and familiar with the directives included to ensure that the individual receives the care needed to fully recover.

Any questions regarding the content of this document may be sent to [quality@opwdd.ny.gov](mailto:quality@opwdd.ny.gov)