

What is S.B.E. Prophylaxis?

SBE stands for subacute bacterial endocarditis. Endocarditis means an infection of the heart. Your doctor may tell you that your child needs SBE Prophylaxis. What this means is that when the patient goes to the dentist for teeth cleaning or dental work, or certain kinds of surgery, it is suggested that the patient be given antibiotics. This is usually given as one dose of Amoxicillin one hour before the procedure. For patients who are at high risk a second dose is given six hours later. We do not recommend piercing the tongue in heart patients, as it can be a constant source of infection to the blood stream.

Who needs SBE Prophylaxis? Any patient with a hole in the heart between the ventricles, an abnormal valve, a patent ductus arteriosus, a systemic to pulmonary artery shunt, coarctation of the aorta, Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy, previous history of endocarditis or with any foreign material in the heart should receive antibiotics. The American Heart Association feels that people with pacemakers do not need SBE Prophylaxis.

Why is this necessary? Most of the time the blood is sterile. When certain procedures are done (such as dental cleaning, or certain kinds of surgery such as a tonsillectomy) or if there is trauma to the mouth, bacteria enter the blood stream. Normally the inside of the heart is smooth like glass and if any bacteria is in the blood stream as they float through the heart they will land and then bounce off the walls and keep going to be eventually filtered out by the spleen. In people with abnormalities of the heart, the inner surface of the heart becomes slightly roughened and becomes like a giant condominium for the bacteria. They land on the surface and then begin to multiply and can cause an infection. It is not necessary to give antibiotics for simple cuts on the skin because the tissue under the surface is usually sterile and clean.

An infection of the heart is very serious and can be lethal. It requires treatment with I.V. antibiotics for 2 to 6 weeks. Sometimes the heart can be damaged and may need to have a valve replaced. Sometimes infection can spread from the heart to other organs of the body such as the lungs, kidneys, brain and eyes. For this reason the American Heart Association recommends giving antibiotics to prevent this from happening. The dose of antibiotics is high so that we will sterilize the blood for a relatively short period of time. It is not necessary to give antibiotics for simple colds as these are caused by viruses. The most common type of antibiotic used is Amoxicillin. If a patient is allergic to this drug, then a substitution with Clindamycin or clarithromycin is suggested. It is not felt to be necessary to give antibiotics for a cardiac catheterization, vaginal deliveries, C-Sections or circumcisions.