

## Risk for Hospitalization for Infection in Patients Who Have Had Splenectomy

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The full report is titled “Risk for Hospital Contact With Infection in Patients With Splenectomy. A Population-Based Cohort Study.” It is in the 20 October 2009 issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine* (volume 151, pages 546-555). The authors are R.W. Thomsen, W.M. Schoonen, D.K. Farkas, A. Riis, J. Jacobsen, J.P. Fryzek, and H.T. Sørensen.

### What is the problem and what is known about it so far?

The spleen is an organ in the abdomen. It helps fight some types of infection, but persons can live without their spleen. The spleen sometimes needs to be removed surgically (splenectomy) because it gets injured in an accident or because of a blood condition or cancer. Patients are at risk for some bacterial infections after splenectomy, but no large, long-term studies have been done on the increased risk for infection after splenectomy.

### Why did the researchers do this particular study?

To describe the risk for infection after splenectomy.

### Who was studied?

All 3812 patients in Denmark who had splenectomy from 1996 to 2005. The researchers also studied 3 comparison groups from Denmark: the general population, patients who had their appendixes removed, and patients who had a condition (such as trauma or cancer) that could have led to splenectomy but did not.

### How was the study done?

The researchers searched computerized health care databases for hospitalizations for infection in the splenectomy patients and in the 3 comparison groups over time.

### What did the researchers find?

The risk for hospitalization for infection was highest in patients within 90 days of spleen removal. The differences in infections between splenectomy and comparison patients were largest when compared with the general population and the appendectomy patients. However, splenectomy patients also had higher risk for infection than patients who did not have splenectomy but did have conditions that sometimes require splenectomy. The risk for infection after splenectomy was highest in patients who had splenectomy because of a blood condition.

### What were the limitations of the study?

The study looked only at infections that required hospitalization.

### What are the implications of the study?

Splenectomy is associated with risk for hospitalization for infection in both the short and the long term.

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