

Wound Irrigation

● SKILL SNAPSHOT

Purpose

- Cleanses a wound by controlled fluid flow to remove loose debris, exudate, and contaminants without damaging tissue.

When to use

- Ordered cleansing of open wounds, traumatic wounds, or during dressing changes; solution and pressure depend on wound type.

Supplies needed

- Ordered irrigant (commonly sterile normal saline); irrigation syringe/catheter per policy; basin; clean/sterile gloves; gown, mask/eye shield; dressings; measuring tools.

● PREP + PATIENT SETUP

- Verify order, allergies, wound plan, solution, temperature, and analgesia.
- Explain procedure; provide privacy and position to allow drainage.
- Assess wound, pain, perfusion, and prior

● VAULT TIP

- Control splash and drainage before starting. A smooth, one-way flow protects both the patient and the nurse.

● STEP-BY-STEP

1. Hand hygiene; identify patient; medicate for pain early enough to work.
2. Apply splash protection and other PPE. Remove old dressing with clean gloves; note drainage, then discard.
3. Hand hygiene. Set up a clean or sterile field exactly as ordered/policy requires.
4. Warm solution to near body temperature if appropriate; verify solution and expiration.
5. Position basin below wound. Protect intact periwound skin.
6. Fill irrigation device without contaminating tip. Avoid touching the wound with the syringe or catheter.
7. Irrigate from the cleanest area toward the least clean area and from top to bottom, allowing solution to flow into the basin.
8. Use only enough pressure to remove debris without driving bacteria into tissue or causing trauma; follow device and facility guidance.
9. Continue until return is clear or the ordered volume is used. Do not force fluid into a tract where return cannot be seen.
10. Gently blot periwound skin; do not scrub viable granulation tissue.
11. Assess wound bed, edges, undermining/tunneling, odor, exudate, bleeding, and patient tolerance.
12. Pack only if ordered; fill dead space lightly without overpacking. Apply ordered dressing.
13. Dispose of contaminated supplies, remove PPE, perform hand hygiene, and reassess pain.

● SAFETY REMINDERS

- Wear eye/face protection: irrigation can splash infectious material.
- Do not use cytotoxic antiseptics unless specifically ordered.
- Stop for brisk bleeding, severe pain, tissue injury, or unexpected tract.
- Use one-direction flow; never reuse returned solution.

● COMMON MISTAKES

- Using excessive pressure or a needle.
- Irrigating from dirty toward clean tissue.
- Touching the syringe tip to the wound.
- Packing tightly or leaving packing unaccounted for.

● DOCUMENTATION

- Wound location/type and measurements.
- Bed tissue, edges, periwound, odor, exudate.
- Solution, amount, technique, and return.
- Dressing/packing type and pieces used.
- Pain, tolerance, teaching, provider notification.