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What is a PICC line?

- PICC stands for “peripherally inserted central catheter” – an IV that gets inserted into a deep vein in the upper arm and threaded through that vein until the tip sits just above the heart.
- The reason for placing the line this way is that the veins just above the heart are much sturdier than smaller veins in the arm, so antibiotics can be safely put through these veins over a much longer period of time.
- If you cannot get a PICC line, the next option is a tunneled line – this line goes into one of your jugular veins (in the neck) but gets buried (“tunneled”) under the skin so the hub comes out through the skin on your chest.
- If you already have a port in place (IV access implanted under the skin), we can likely use this for antibiotic infusions.
- Any type of long-term IV poses a small risk for provoking a blood clot (called a “deep vein thrombosis” or DVT for short). If you notice new pain or swelling in the arm closest to the line, please notify us right away.
- Long-term IVs can also lead to bloodstream infections, particularly if the line is not cared for properly. It is possible to get another infection while on antibiotics, since there are always more bacteria out there that may not be killed by the antibiotics you are receiving. If you notice redness, drainage, or pain around your IV site, or if you develop new fevers, chills or sweats after being on antibiotics for a while, let us know right away.