

Looking out for the signs of sepsis

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: June 2023

Updated: July 2025

Next review: June 2026

Leaflet number: 295 Version: 2.1

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a serious condition that happens when your body overreacts to an infection. Instead of just fighting the infection, your immune system causes widespread inflammation, which can damage your organs. If not treated quickly, sepsis can lead to septic shock, which is life-threatening.

Every year in the UK 245,000 people are affected by sepsis, and sadly there are around 48,000 sepsis related deaths per year. But if spotted early, most people recover fully.

You cannot catch sepsis from another person. Sepsis is sometimes called septicaemia or blood poisoning.

This leaflet will be given to patients who are more at risk of getting an infection that could lead to sepsis, or patients who are currently being treated for an infection. It will tell you about some of the signs of sepsis, and what to do if you think you or someone you look after has symptoms of sepsis.

Who is at risk of getting sepsis?

Some people are more likely to get an infection that could lead to sepsis. These include the following:

- If you have had an operation or invasive procedure in the last 6 weeks.
- If you are very young, very old or frail.
- If you are pregnant, have given birth or had a termination of pregnancy or miscarriage in the last 6 weeks.

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or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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- If you have a weak immune system due to illness such as diabetes, sickle cell disease, splenectomy and leukaemia.
- If you have a weak immune system due to taking drugs such as long-term steroids, anti-rejection drugs after an organ transplant, and immunosuppressant drugs used in conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis.
- If you misuse drugs intravenously.

If you have been treated for an infection you may have been assessed as being well enough to continue your recovery at home. It is most likely you will continue to get better without any further problems. However there is a small risk that the infection may become more severe and that you develop sepsis as a response.

Anyone that is at risk of getting an infection, or has been treated for an infection **must** look out for the signs of sepsis as detailed below.

What are the signs of sepsis and when should I seek help?

Sepsis can be hard to spot. There are lots of possible symptoms. In the early stages of sepsis, symptoms can be very similar to those of 'flu'.

If you become increasingly unwell or have any of the following symptoms, we advise you to call 999 and say "this could be sepsis":

- Confusion (not knowing where you are, getting things muddled or not recognising familiar people).
- Extreme shivering or severe muscle pain.
- Not had a pee (pass urine) in 18 hours, or a whole day.
- Severe breathlessness.
- Feeling 'I know something is badly wrong with me'.
- Skin that is mottled, bluish or very pale.
- Dizziness that leads to a faint or collapse.
- Racing heart beat.

Remember, if it does turn out to be sepsis, getting treated even 1 hour earlier might make the difference between life and death.

How is sepsis treated?

If sepsis is diagnosed you will be admitted to hospital for treatment such as injectable antibiotics, fluids and oxygen.

For some people, admission to a critical care unit (also known as intensive care) may be needed. This is so we can monitor you closely and so we can support your major organs like your heart, kidneys and lungs whilst the sepsis is being treated.

People with severe sepsis are likely to develop problems with vital organs and be very ill, and the condition can cause death. However, if identified and treated quickly, most people recover fully with no lasting problems.

Further information

For more information visit:

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/sepsis
- www.sepsistrust.org

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