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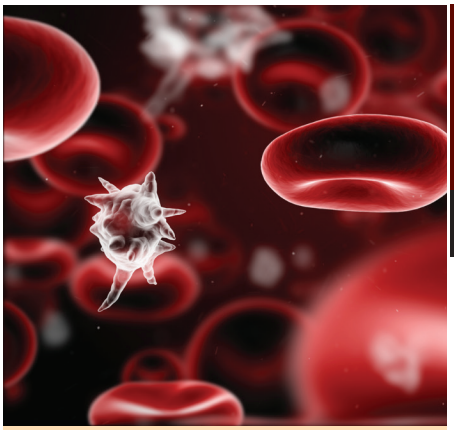


SEPSIS FACT SHEET

A POTENTIALLY DEADLY OUTCOME FROM AN INFECTION

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a complication caused by the body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to an infection, which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

When can you get sepsis?

Sepsis can occur to anyone, at any time, from any type of infection, and can affect any part of the body. It can occur even after a minor infection.

What causes sepsis?

Infections can lead to sepsis. An infection occurs when germs enter a person's body and multiply, causing illness and organ and tissue damage. Certain infections and germs lead to sepsis most often. Sepsis is often associated with infections of the lungs (e.g., pneumonia), urinary tract (e.g., kidney), skin, and gut. *Staphylococcus aureus* (*staph*), *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), and some types of *Streptococcus* (*strep*) are common germs that can cause sepsis.

Are certain people with an infection more likely to get sepsis?

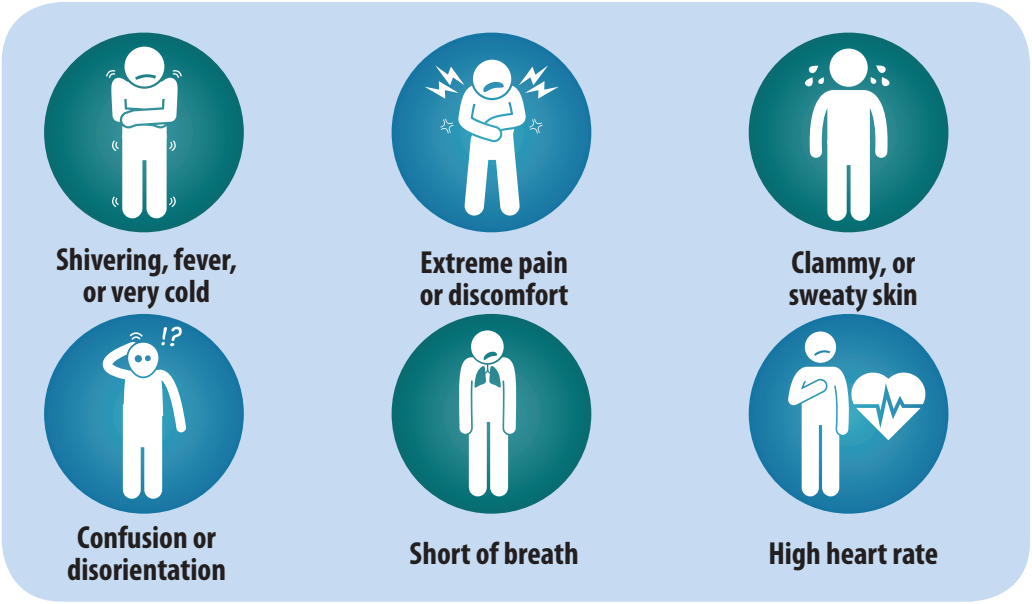
Anyone can develop sepsis from an infection, especially when not treated properly. However, sepsis occurs most often in people aged 65 years or older or less than 1 year, have weakened immune systems, or have chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes).

A CDC evaluation found more than 90% of adults and 70% of children who developed sepsis had a health condition that may have put them at risk.

Ask your doctor about your risk for getting sepsis. If you suspect sepsis, ask your doctor, "Could it be sepsis?

What are the symptoms of sepsis?

There is no single sign or symptom of sepsis. It is, rather, a combination of symptoms. Since sepsis is the result of an infection, symptoms can include infection signs (diarrhea, vomiting, sore throat, etc.), as well as **ANY** of the **SYMPTOMS** below:



What should I do if I think I have an infection or sepsis?

- Call your doctor or go to the emergency room immediately if you have any signs or symptoms of an infection or sepsis. This is a medical emergency.
- It's important that you say, "**I AM CONCERNED ABOUT SEPSIS**."
- If you are continuing to feel worse or not getting better in the days after surgery, ask your doctor about sepsis. Sepsis is a common complication of people hospitalized for other reasons.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases

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How is sepsis diagnosed?

Doctors diagnose sepsis using a number of physical findings like fever, increased heart rate, and increased breathing rate. They also do lab tests that check for signs of infection.

Many of the symptoms of sepsis, such as fever and difficulty breathing, are the same as in other conditions, making sepsis hard to diagnose in its early stages.

How is sepsis treated?

People with sepsis are usually treated in the hospital. Doctors try to treat the infection, keep the vital organs working, and prevent a drop in blood pressure.

Doctors treat sepsis with therapy, such as appropriate use of antibiotics, as soon as possible. Many patients receive oxygen and intravenous (IV) fluids to maintain normal blood oxygen levels and blood pressure.

Other types of treatment, such as assisting breathing with a machine or kidney dialysis, may be necessary. Sometimes surgery is required to remove tissue damaged by the infection.

Are there any long-term effects of sepsis?

Many people who have sepsis recover completely and their lives return to normal. But some people may experience permanent organ damage. For example, in someone who already has kidney problems, sepsis can lead to kidney failure that requires lifelong dialysis.

How can I prevent sepsis?

1 **GET VACCINATED** against the flu, pneumonia, and any other infections that could lead to sepsis. Talk to your doctor for more information.

2 **PREVENT INFECTIONS** that can lead to sepsis by:

- **Cleaning** scrapes and wounds
- Practicing good **hygiene** (e.g., hand washing)

3 **LEARN THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS** of sepsis. If sepsis is suspected, seek medical attention immediately.

Where can I get more information?

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—CDC works 24/7 protecting America's health, safety and security. Whether diseases start at home or abroad, are curable or preventable, chronic or acute, stem from human error or deliberate attack, CDC is committed to responding to America's most pressing health challenges.
  cdc.gov/sepsis
  cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections

- The Rory Staunton Foundation for Sepsis Prevention—Supports education and outreach efforts aimed at rapid diagnosis and treatment of sepsis, particularly in children.
  rorystauntonfoundationforsepsis.org

- Sepsis Alliance®—Created to raise sepsis awareness among both the general public and healthcare professionals. Sepsis Alliance offers information on a variety of sepsis-related topics. Visit sepsis.org/library to view the complete series of titles.
  sepsis.org

THE RORY STAUNTON FOUNDATION FOR SEPSIS PREVENTION

SEPSIS ALLIANCE
Suspect Sepsis. Save Lives.

This fact sheet was developed in collaboration with CDC, Sepsis Alliance® and the Rory Staunton Foundation for Sepsis Prevention.