

Sepsis

Sepsis can cause death. If you or someone you look after has any of the following serious symptoms of sepsis, immediately **call Triple Zero (000) or go to a hospital emergency department.**

Serious symptoms of sepsis can include:

- feeling very sick (the worst you have ever felt) or getting very sick, very quickly
- difficulty breathing or breathing very quickly (in children or babies you may notice grunting noises or their lower chest getting sucked in as they breath)
- not needing to urinate (wee) all day or less wet nappies (less wee) than usual in young children or babies
- a new concerning rash or rash that does not fade when you roll a glass over it
- confusion
- blue, grey, pale or blotchy skin
- feeling like your child is very sick. You know your child best. Trust your instincts if you think something is wrong.

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is when your body has an extreme response to an infection. It is a life- threatening condition and you need immediate medical attention. It can cause death or permanent damage to your body without treatment.

Sepsis always starts with an infection. Infections which may cause sepsis can be anywhere in the body, such as chest, abdominal (for example after kidney or gall stones) and urinary infections.

What are the symptoms of sepsis?

There are many signs and symptoms of sepsis. Follow the advice below.

You do not need to have all the symptoms listed.

Not all infections lead to sepsis. However, if you have already seen your doctor and have been told you have an infection, and you are worried that you or your child are getting worse, then go back for another review and ask, 'could it be sepsis?'

Adults and older children

Serious symptoms

Immediately call Triple Zero (000) or go to a hospital emergency department if you have any of these serious symptoms of sepsis:

- feeling very sick (the worst you have ever felt) or getting very sick, very quickly
- difficulty breathing or breathing very quickly
- confusion
- not needing to urinate (wee) all day
- a new concerning rash or rash that does not fade when you roll a glass over it
- blue, grey, pale or blotchy skin.

General symptoms

If you are unsure or if you have any of these general symptoms of infection that may lead to sepsis **call your doctor or healthdirect on 1800 022 222** (a 24-hour service):

- fever or shivering
- feeling very tired
- vomiting or diarrhoea
- headache
- swelling or pain around a cut or wound
- sore muscles, joints, or limbs
- rapid heart rate or pulse.

Young children and babies

Serious symptoms

Immediately call Triple Zero (000) or go to a hospital emergency department if your baby or young child have any of these serious symptoms of sepsis:

- you feel like your child is very sick or feel that something is seriously wrong with your child - you know your child best
- getting very sick, very quickly
- not needing to urinate (wee) all day or less wet nappies (less wee) than usual
- being quieter or sleepier than normal or difficult to wake
- irritable and can't comfort them
- a new concerning rash or a rash that does not fade when you roll a glass over it
- blue, grey, pale or blotchy skin
- difficulty breathing (you may notice grunting noises or their lower chest getting sucked in as they breath) or breathing very quickly
- fever in a child less than 3 months old
- low temperature or cold skin in babies less than 1 month old
- feels floppy when you pick them up
- convulsions or seizures
- a weak or high-pitched cry that's not the same as their normal cry.

General symptoms

If you are unsure or if your baby or young child has any of these general symptoms of infection that may lead to sepsis **call your doctor or healthdirect on 1800 022 222 (a 24-hour service)**:

- fevers in children older than 3 months
- not behaving or acting like they normally do or not interested in eating, feeding or normal activities
- vomiting or diarrhoea
- swelling or pain around a cut or wound.

Pregnant women or women who have recently given birth (also known as maternal sepsis)

Immediately call Triple Zero (000) or go to a hospital emergency department if you have any of the same symptoms as adults above, as well as:

- lower abdominal pain
- discoloured or odorous vaginal discharge (fluid)
- unexpected bleeding.

How does it spread?

Sepsis does not spread from person to person. However, the original infection that caused sepsis can spread between people.

Who is at risk of sepsis?

Sepsis can affect anyone.

However, some people are more likely to develop sepsis. This includes those who:

- are 5 years of age and under, especially babies under 3 months of age
- are 65 years of age and older
- are pregnant or have recently given birth (within 6 weeks)
- have a weak immune system
- have an existing, chronic illness such as diabetes, lung disease, cancer or kidney disease
- have had sepsis before
- have recently been in hospital or had a severe illness
- are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

How is sepsis prevented?

You can lower your risk of sepsis by preventing infection and managing chronic illnesses:

- Practise good hygiene. Wash or sanitise your hands often and cover your coughs and sneezes
- Do not share personal items (e.g. razors, toothbrushes)
- Cover cuts and wounds and keep them clean until healed

- Keep up to date with your recommended vaccinations
- Speak to your doctor regularly if you have a chronic health condition such as diabetes, lung disease or kidney disease. Follow their advice, including taking prescribed medicines.
- Stay at home if you are sick to protect others.

How is sepsis diagnosed?

There is no single test for sepsis. To see if you have sepsis, a doctor will:

- ask you about your symptoms
- examine you and
- perform some tests.

What to do if you think you have sepsis

Call Triple Zero (000) or go to a hospital emergency department immediately if you think you have any of the serious symptoms of sepsis.

How is sepsis treated?

Sepsis is serious and may cause death or permanent damage to your body without treatment. Treatment for sepsis works best when started as soon as possible. People with sepsis are treated in hospital.

You may need to be treated in an intensive care unit (ICU) in the hospital if you are really sick. Treatment may include:

- medicines such as antibiotics
- fluids through a drip (needle in your arm)
- breathing support
- surgery (if needed).

What is post-sepsis syndrome?

People that recover from sepsis can sometimes experience long-term physical, psychological and emotional effects from sepsis. This is called 'post-sepsis syndrome'. It can last between 6 and 18 months but can sometimes last longer.

Effects of post-sepsis syndrome can include:

- difficulty sleeping (such as insomnia)
- nightmares, hallucinations, flashbacks and panic attacks
- muscle and joint pain that can be severe and disabling
- feeling very tired
- inability to concentrate
- confusion
- loss of confidence and self-belief.

Speak to your doctor if you are concerned about post-sepsis syndrome.

What is the public health response for sepsis?

Doctors and laboratories may need to notify the local Public Health Unit if the infection which caused your sepsis is a notifiable condition. Public Health Unit staff may contact your close contacts to give advice and discuss any medicines they may need.