

Sepsis

Information for patients and families

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is your body fighting a severe infection. It is a medical emergency. If we don't recognise the signs and treat you quickly, sepsis can lead to shock, organ damage and even death. We need to act quickly. Many different types of germs or bugs can cause sepsis; these include bacteria, fungi and viruses. Bacterial infection is the most common, but for some the source is unknown.

How is sepsis detected?

If we suspect you may have sepsis we will observe you closely. We will also carry out several tests, including taking your blood, to find out where the infection is coming from.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can get sepsis, however you may be at a higher risk if you:

- Have a weakened immune system
- Are an infant or child
- Are over 65 years of age
- Have a long-term illness
- Suffered from a severe burn or physical trauma
- Have recently undergone surgery.



Signs and symptoms

Sepsis is hard to recognise. Usually the first signs are related to a particular source of infection. Some of the signs and symptoms you may have are:

- Feeling short of breath
- Having a fast heartbeat
- Feeling dizzy and faint
- Being confused or talking unclearly
- Having diarrhoea
- Feeling very hot or cold
- Being easily upset and agitated
- Having low blood pressure
- Feeling tired or drowsy
- Muscle aches and pains.

We regularly check your heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, fluid status and whether you are alert. Nonetheless if you have two or more of these signs and symptoms, we will assess you for sepsis.

Preventing sepsis

The key to preventing sepsis is to prevent an infection from occurring in the first place. The risk of getting an infection drops by doing some simple things:

- Washing your hands properly and frequently can stop many of the germs that could enter your body
- Proper care of all wounds
- Keeping up to date with your vaccinations
- Reducing contact with people who are sick.

Any infection should be taken seriously. Do not hope it will go away.

What is the treatment?

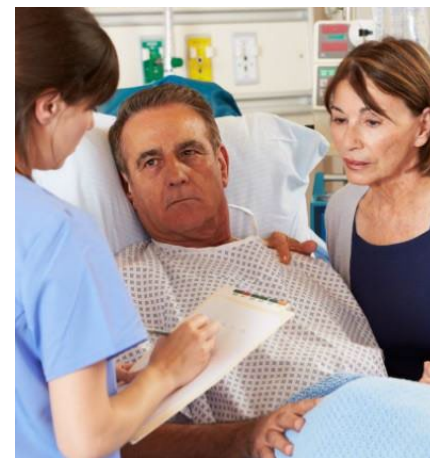
Treatment of a patient with sepsis involves giving:

- Drugs (antibiotics) to kill the germs that cause serious infection
- Intravenous fluids (given through a tube in a vein) to help support your blood pressure
- Extra oxygen to make sure there is enough reaching your body's tissues.

It is recommended that we give antibiotics as soon as possible once we know or suspect that you have sepsis. Every ward in our hospitals has access to guidelines and antibiotics they need to treat sepsis. This helps the doctors and nurses make the right decisions and give the antibiotics quickly.

Recovery

How long you are sick and how well you recover will depend on many things. Your doctors and nurses will talk to you about your treatment and ongoing care. They will talk to your family or caregiver as well if this is what you want.



Concerned?

Please see your GP or go to the nearest Emergency Department if you have any concerns.

Call '000' in an emergency.

Survey

If you have had a diagnosis of sepsis, please tell us about your healthcare experience. [Click here](#) or use QR code:



Need an Interpreter? Interpreters are available if you need help to communicate with staff. The service is free and confidential. We will book the interpreter for you. You can also call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 if you need to speak to someone before your appointment.

Need an Aboriginal Health Worker? An Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) advocates for the needs of consumers who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. They can provide support and information to help you. Tell staff you would like to speak to an AHW, or let them know if there is an AHW you would like us to contact.