



Could it be sepsis?

Information for patients, families and carers

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is your body's extreme response to infection. It is a life-threatening medical emergency. It can cause damage to important organs such as your heart or lungs. Without timely treatment, sepsis can rapidly lead to serious illness, organ failure and death.

What causes sepsis?

Sepsis is caused by infections. When germs enter your body, they can lead to an infection. If that infection is not treated or stopped, it can cause sepsis. The most common causes of sepsis are from lung, urinary and abdominal infections. They can be caused by bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungal infections.



What are the signs and symptoms?



Fever, shivering or feeling very cold



Short of breath



Heart beating too fast



Confusion or disorientation



Feeling really tired



Clammy or sweaty skin



Pain or discomfort



Rash or change in skin colour



Not much urine



Diarrhoea



Vomiting or feeling sick in the stomach

Who is at risk of developing sepsis?

Sepsis can affect anyone. There are some people that are at greater risk of developing sepsis, including:

- Anyone with an infection that is not getting better
- Older people, newborns and young children
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- People with complex health conditions, chronic disease such as diabetes, kidney, liver or heart disease
- People with a weak immune system including those being treated for cancer with chemotherapy
- People with COVID-19 or pneumonia
- People who are pregnant or have just given birth
- People who have had sepsis before
- People with burns, wounds and injuries
- People with medical devices in their body such as a pacemaker, stent, catheter, or prosthetic valve
- People who have had recent surgery.

How is sepsis treated?

Sepsis is a time-critical medical emergency and needs to be treated quickly. Doctors and nurses will assess your symptoms, take your medical history, check your vital signs, and perform tests to help find the source of infection. Some of these tests could include blood cultures to help identify the cause of infection.

The doctors and nurses will give you antimicrobials, intravenous fluids and other medications. You may require surgery to wash the infection from your body. They will continue to monitor how you are responding to treatment. If you become very sick, you may need to be transferred to the Intensive Care Unit for specialist care and treatment. If you are worried that your condition, or the condition of someone you are caring for is getting worse tell a doctor or nurse.

How to prevent sepsis?

There are several steps that you can take to help prevent sepsis.

1. Practise good hygiene: Keep your body and hands clean.
2. Keep wounds and cuts clean and covered until healed.
3. Stay up-to-date with your vaccinations.
4. Look after your chronic diseases.
5. Know the signs and symptoms of sepsis, act fast and seek medical care immediately.

Could it be sepsis?

Sepsis can be difficult to recognise. Know the signs and symptoms of sepsis and act quickly.

If you suspect sepsis call triple zero (000) and don't be afraid to speak up and ask the question "Could this be sepsis?"



Department of Health



If you, or the person you care for gets sicker, tell us right away

Step 1 Worried about a change in your condition or the person you care for? Tell us.

Step 2 Still worried? Speak to a senior staff member.

Step 3 If your concern is urgent, make a call on **1800 792 621**

You know yourself or your loved one best.
We will listen to you.

healthywa.wa.gov.au



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Further information

<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/clinical-care-standards/sepsis-clinical-care-standard/information-consumers>

australiansepsisnetwork.net.au



Scan the QR code for more information



The information provided is for information purposes only. If you are a patient using this publication, you should seek assistance from a healthcare professional when interpreting these materials and applying them to your individual circumstances.



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