

Sepsis Safety

Netting Information for Adults

This leaflet is designed for adults who may be at high risk of serious infection or sepsis. It explains what sepsis is, how it's treated, and when to seek help.

Your medical team will talk to you about why you may be at higher risk of sepsis and what to do if you need help or advice. If you have not had that conversation, and have any questions after reading this leaflet, please speak to a healthcare professional.

What is sepsis?

Sepsis happens when the body's immune system overreacts to an infection. It can be life threatening but early treatment can help stop sepsis becoming more serious. The infection can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or sometimes fungi.

Sepsis can occur following infections such as:

- Pneumonia
- Urinary tract infection
- Meningitis
- Abdominal infection
- Skin infection, wound, burn or bite
- Bone or joint infection

Who can be at risk of having sepsis?

Anyone can get sepsis, but it's more likely if you:

- Are over 75 or frail
- Are under 1 year old
- Have a weakened immune system (e.g., diabetes)
- Are taking long-term steroids or immunosuppressant drugs
- Are being treated for cancer with chemotherapy
- Have recently had surgery, or other invasive procedures
- Have wounds or burns
- Are pregnant, or have recently given birth, had a miscarriage or termination

What are the signs and symptoms of sepsis?

Look out for:

- Feeling very unwell or getting worse quickly
- Drowsiness, slurred speech, confusion or agitation
- Extreme shivering or muscle pain
- Not weeing or hardly weeing
- Feeling breathless

- A very fast heart rate
- Changes to skin colour/ lips or tongue, mottling, or a rash which does not go away when pressed on
- High temperature: above 38°C (or above 37.5°C if receiving chemotherapy)
- Low temperature: below 36°C

How is sepsis treated?

When sepsis is suspected, treatment is started with antibiotics, as bacteria are the most common cause. The type of antibiotic will depend on where the infection is. You may have blood tests, x-rays, or scans to find the cause and location of the infection.

Other treatments might include:

- Fluids through a drip
- Oxygen
- Medicines to raise your blood pressure
- Sometimes surgery is needed to remove the source of infection

What happens after sepsis?

Most people who have had sepsis will get better completely. But everyone is different, so some people may get better quickly, while others may take longer.

It's normal to feel tired for a while after having sepsis.

How can I reduce the risk of sepsis?

To lower your risk:

- Don't ignore signs of infection (most infections can be treated easily if caught early)
- Practice good hygiene
- Stay away from people with colds, coughs, diarrhoea or vomiting
- Keep up to date with vaccinations

Just Ask: "Could it be sepsis?"

If someone has any signs of sepsis ring the emergency contact numbers provided by your medical team, call 999, or go to the nearest A&E straight away.