

What is Sepsis?

Sepsis is a severe infection, sometimes called blood poisoning. It occurs when the body's response to an infection damages its own tissues and organs.

It is a medical emergency. Without early recognition and prompt treatment, it can lead to shock, damage to your body's organs and even death.

Severe sepsis requires immediate treatment in hospital.

Many different types of germs or 'bugs' can cause sepsis, including bacteria, fungi and viruses.

Bacteria are the most common cause, although in up to 30 per cent of patients, a source of infection cannot be identified.

Adults and children at risk of sepsis

Sepsis can affect anyone, although, some people are at a higher risk than others.

They include people who:

- are very old
- are very young
- have an illness that affects the immune system
- are taking medications to treat cancer
- have had an organ transplant and are taking anti-rejection medications
- have a chronic illness
- are on long-term steroids
- are diabetic.

Symptoms

Sepsis is difficult to recognise, as it can have similar symptoms to other illnesses.

Early signs and symptoms may include a combination of the following:

- rapid shallow breathing
- rapid heart rate
- confusion or slurred speech
- aching muscles
- feeling very hot or very cold
- loose stools (diarrhoea)
- reduced activity or drowsiness
- not feel like eating
- poor or reduced feeding in infants
- poor urine output or fewer wet nappies.

Laboratory tests may be done to identify the cause of the infection.

Treatment

Medications, such as antibiotics, are prescribed by your doctor based on the type of infection causing the illness.

The first antibiotics are usually broad-spectrum, which means it is effective against several of the more common bacteria.

They are injected into your vein, to get into the blood system quickly.

Antibiotics alone will not treat sepsis. Extra fluids are also needed to help keep blood pressure from being dangerously low. Extra fluids are given directly into the vein by an intravenous drip.

People with severe sepsis usually require close monitoring and specialised medicines. This may involve being transferred to an intensive care unit, where there are high levels of specialised nursing and medical care.

Recovery

The duration of illness and recovery from sepsis varies from patient to patient. Your medical team will discuss your treatment and ongoing care with you and your family, or care giver.

