

Sepsis

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a life-threatening illness that arises when the body's response to an infection injures its own tissues and organs. Anyone can get an infection, and almost any infection, including COVID-19, pneumonia, stomach infections, influenza, etc, can lead to sepsis.

According to recent studies, one in eighteen deaths in Canada involves sepsis, making it the twelfth leading cause of death nationally. Globally, sepsis affects an estimated 18 million people each year.

Is sepsis contagious?

No, you can't spread sepsis to other people. However, an infection can result in sepsis, and you can spread some infections to other people.

Common causes:

Recent studies indicated that the commonest causes of sepsis cases and sepsis-related death across all ages were diarrhoeal diseases and lower respiratory infections. However, non-communicable diseases such as chronic illness are on the rise.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can get an infection, and almost any infection can lead to sepsis if untreated. However, certain people are at higher risk.

- adults 65 and older;
- pregnant or recently pregnant women;
- children younger than one-year-old;
- people with recent severe illness or hospitalization;
- people with weakened immune systems (e.g., HIV, cancer);
- people with chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, lung disease, kidney disease).



Signs and symptoms:

Sepsis is a medical emergency. It can cause different signs and symptoms at different times. People who think they may have sepsis should seek medical care right away.

Common signs and symptoms include:

- ✓ fever or low temperature and shivering;
- ✓ high heart rate, weak pulse, or low blood pressure;
- ✓ difficulty breathing;
- ✓ clammy and sweaty skin;
- ✓ altered mental status (e.g., confusion or disorientation);
- ✓ extreme body pain or discomfort;
- ✓ low urine output or decreased urination.

Common symptoms in children include:

- ✓ fast breathing
- ✓ convulsions
- ✓ pale skin
- ✓ lethargy
- ✓ difficulty waking up
- ✓ feeling cold to the touch

Furthermore, it can cause difficulty feeding, frequent vomiting, or lack of urination in children under five years old.

Prevention:

The best way to reduce the risk of sepsis is to avoid infections. Steps include:

- getting vaccines recommended by the NITHA Medical Health Officer (MHO)/the community/public health nurses;
- complying with the recommended infection control measures such as good personal hygiene, hand hygiene, safe food preparation, etc.;
- avoiding unclean water or unsanitary toilets;
- eating a healthy diet;
- breastfeeding for newborns.

Treatment:

Treatment for sepsis requires medical care. It will include antimicrobials, intravenous fluids, and careful monitoring.

If you have a bacterial infection and have already seen a doctor, you have probably been prescribed antibiotics. It is imperative to take this medication as recommended. Ensure you complete the prescribed dose, even if you start to feel better part-way through. Do not share antibiotics with family or friends.

If 72 hours have passed and your infection isn't going away or is getting worse, go to your community clinic/health center immediately. Your healthcare provider may need to treat you with another type of antibiotic.

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Adapted from [#SepsisAwareness](#), [Prevention](#) – Canadian Sepsis Foundation, [What is Sepsis?](#) | [Sepsis](#) | [CDC](#) and [Sepsis \(who.int\)](#).