

Sepsis: know the signs, and save a life

Information for patients

Out of approximately 250,000 cases of sepsis each year in the UK, 46,000 people will die (Sepsis Trust, UK). By being aware of the early warning signs of this illness this number can be reduced.

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a serious complication of an infection that without quick treatment can cause multiple organ failure (source: NHS, 2017).



What should I do if I have any concerns?

If you notice any changes or are worried about yourself or a loved one, please speak to a member of staff and explain your concerns. You will sometimes notice changes in the person you are visiting quicker than staff as you know them when they are well/normal. Please do not hesitate to tell the nurse looking after them as soon as you can.

If you are at home and you feel unwell or start noticing some of the symptoms of sepsis please either see your GP or call NHS 111 for advice. Or alternatively, if you are concerned attend your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department or call 999.

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145 or 01227 864314, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhft.nhs.uk/patientinformation

Each of these treatments will help you respond to the infection. Other tests may be needed and will be discussed with you by your doctor.

While in hospital you will be closely monitored and your vital signs (blood pressure, temperature, breathing rate, oxygen saturation, and heart beat) will be recorded.

How long will I have to stay in hospital?

Your hospital stay will depend on how your body is coping with fighting the infection, the results of your blood tests, and your individual treatment plan.

Not all patients will have to stay in hospital until the infection has cleared. This will be discussed with your doctor.

When can I go home?

Once your doctor is happy for you to be discharged from hospital you will most likely go home with new medications. This does not mean the infection has gone but it is under control and you should slowly start getting better.

When can I return to work? How will I feel?

There is no specific length of time to stay off work; it depends on you and your job. You will feel more tired than usual on leaving hospital, while your body is recovering from the infection. This is completely normal.

How do you get sepsis?

Sepsis can be triggered by an infection in any part of your body. The most common sites of infection leading to sepsis are the lungs, urinary tract, tummy (abdomen), and pelvis.

Sepsis is not linked with certain people or illnesses; it can affect anyone, but is more common after a minor illness.

The people who are at higher risk, are those who:

- have long-term medical conditions
- are already in hospital with an acute illness, and have low immune systems
- have recently had chemotherapy or surgery
- have open wounds or injuries
- are very young or very old
- have had a recent serious illness.

Is sepsis contagious?

No, it is not contagious.

What are the symptoms?

Early symptoms of sepsis include:

- very high or very low temperature
- shivering or chills
- fast heartbeat
- fast breathing
- feeling ill, not feeling your usual self.

These can then be followed with:

- dizziness or fainting
- sudden confusion
- being sick
- diarrhoea
- muscle ache and pains for no reason
- mottled skin (see photo below)
- breathing problems
- not passing your normal amount of urine
- slurred speech.



Skin mottling in sepsis

Please note that many of these symptoms can be associated with other illnesses, so do not panic. If you have concerns please contact your GP or, if in hospital, your hospital doctor or nurse.

How is it diagnosed?

In East Kent we use the early warning score (EWS) system, which makes sure when a patient is becoming unwell that the signs can be spotted early and acted upon immediately. All clinical staff are trained to spot people becoming more unwell and if EWS are increasing.

Early treatment will help people get better more quickly.

If your nurse or doctor has concerns blood tests will be taken, and possibly an x-ray.

How is sepsis treated?

A diagnosis of sepsis will include a standard course of treatment. The Sepsis 6 Plan was developed in 2005 and is now used in over 30 countries. The introduction of this treatment halved the number of deaths caused by sepsis by 2011 (source: Sepsis Trust).

The Sepsis 6 treatment is oxygen (if needed, a minority of patients will not need oxygen), intravenous antibiotics, intravenous fluids, blood tests including a lactate level and a strict fluid balance. The treatment plan after this is specific to each patient and will be discussed with you by your doctor before any decisions are made.