

## Patient information

# **Sepsis A Guide for Patients and Relatives**

Trust wide Royal Liverpool Hospital Sites

### **What is sepsis?**

Sepsis arises when the body has a life threatening response to infection which then causes damage to the body's tissues and organs. Sepsis can move from a mild illness to a serious one very quickly.

### **Why does sepsis happen?**

An infection may have started in a localised area of the body, but then may become widespread. Sometimes, the body may respond abnormally to infection, which may then cause sepsis.

### **Common areas for infection include:**

- Chest infection (Pneumonia) - this is the most common cause of sepsis.
- Urine/Kidney.
- Wound infection.
- Infected cut or bite.
- Abscesses.
- Line infection.
- Surgical site infections.

Sepsis can be caused by a variety of different bacteria, some of which you may have heard of, such as MRSA, E-Coli and Staphylococcus aureus. In most cases sepsis is caused by bacteria which we come into contact with on a daily basis and does not usually cause us any harm.

## **Who is at risk of getting sepsis?**

Everybody is potentially at risk of developing sepsis from minor infections, however sepsis is most likely to develop in people who:

- Are young or very old.
- Have a weakened immune system.
- Are on long term steroids or drugs to treat cancer (chemotherapy).
- Have serious liver disease.
- Have wounds or injuries.
- Have stayed in hospital for a long time.
- Are pregnant or have just given birth.
- Are malnourished (not eating a balanced diet).

## **Signs and symptoms of sepsis**

In the early stages of sepsis it is often difficult to differentiate sepsis from “flu”. If you have recently had an infection, these are the symptoms to look out for:

- **S**lurred speech or confusion.
- **E**xtrême shivering or muscle pain.
- **P**assing no urine (in a day).
- **S**evere breathlessness.
- “I feel like I might die”.
- **S**kin that is mottled or discoloured.

## **What is septic shock?**

Septic shock is when sepsis causes a very low blood pressure, and despite receiving intravenous fluids and medical intervention the blood pressure remains dangerously low. Septic shock can lead to multiple organ failure and potentially death.

## **How is sepsis diagnosed?**

Sepsis is usually diagnosed by a qualified health care professional. They use your symptoms and other signs to make a diagnosis, such as, temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate.

## **A number of different tests also help to make a diagnosis, for example:**

- Blood tests.
- Imaging like an X-Ray or CT-scan.
- Urine test.
- Kidney, liver and heart function tests.

## **Treatment**

It is important to recognise sepsis early. If sepsis is recognised and treated early, it can improve patient care.

We recommend a set of treatments called the Sepsis Six. These six interventions can be delivered by qualified nurses and doctors, a few studies have shown that by doing the sepsis six within one hour it can double the chance of survival.

### **Sepsis Six (within one hour).**

1. Give Oxygen.
2. Start intravenous fluids ( IV - known as a drip).
3. Start intravenous antibiotics (through a drip).
4. Take blood cultures (a test to look for bacteria in the blood).
5. Check lactate (a blood test).
6. Monitor urine output (the amount of urine you are passing).

It is important to let the doctors know if you have an allergy to any antibiotics as they will want to start antibiotics straight away. Often there is no time to wait and you will be started on a 'broad spectrum' antibiotic. These are designed to work on a wide range of different bacterial infections.

Once a specific type of bacteria has been identified or a source of the infection has been found your antibiotics may change to treat the infection more appropriately.

Antibiotics can cause harm if given inappropriately. Doctors will always prescribe antibiotics with caution, however for sepsis they are the most important life-saving measure.

If vital organs are affected it may be necessary to be admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) for organ support whilst the infection is being treated.

## **Who else will be involved in my care?**

The hospital has a dedicated nurse led sepsis team, who offer advice, support and assistance to staff, patients and relatives.

You may come across lots of different doctors who will help diagnose and treat your infection. There will also be a team of medical and nursing staff, healthcare assistants and physiotherapists caring for you.

### **How long will I be in hospital for?**

The length of time you have to stay in hospital will depend on how bad the infection is and how unwell you are. If you require care on the Intensive Care Unit or a long course of IV antibiotics you may be in hospital for several weeks.

However as soon as you are well enough and your doctor is happy the infection has been treated you will be allowed home if it is safe to do so.

How serious your infection is will determine how long it will take you to fully recover. It could take several months for you to feel fully fit again.

It is likely that your doctors will arrange for you to be followed up in clinic. Your family doctor (GP) will also be informed by the hospital that you have been treated for sepsis.

### **How long will it take to recover?**

It depends on how serious your infection was. For some people it can take several months/years to feel well again.

Your GP can offer counselling and support, or the Sepsis UK Trust can offer advice and support - See website links back page

**We would also like you to help us improve sepsis care – if you are interested in getting involved as a patient or relative, please contact us on:**

**Sepsis Nurse Team**

**3z Link**

**Royal Liverpool Hospital**

**Tel: 0151 706 3865 - Bleep 5167**

**Text phone Number: 18001 0151 706 3865**

**Seven days a week**

### **Feedback**

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

### **Further information**

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**3z Link Royal Liverpool Hospital**

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## Websites

[www.uksepsistrust.org](http://www.uksepsistrust.org)

[www.survivingsepsis.org/bundles](http://www.survivingsepsis.org/bundles)

[www.sepsistrust.org](http://www.sepsistrust.org)

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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