

SEPSIS AWARENESS

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Policy Statement

Sepsis can be triggered by an infection in any part of the body. The most common sites of infection leading to sepsis are the lungs, urinary tract, abdomen and pelvis. There is a greater chance of developing sepsis when in hospital after:

- ✘ recent surgery
- ✘ having a urinary catheter fitted
- ✘ staying in hospital for a long time due to a serious illness

Sources of infection Types of infection associated with sepsis include:

- 👉 lung infection (pneumonia)
- 👉 appendicitis
- 👉 an infection of the thin layer of tissue that lines the inside of the abdomen (peritonitis)
- 👉 an infection of the bladder, urethra or kidneys (urinary tract infection)
- 👉 an infection of the gallbladder (cholecystitis) or bile ducts (cholangitis)
- 👉 skin infections, such as cellulitis – this can be caused by an intravenous catheter that's been inserted through the skin to give fluids or medication
- 👉 infections after surgery
- 👉 infections of the brain and nervous system – such as meningitis or encephalitis
- 👉 flu (in some cases)
- 👉 bone infection (osteomyelitis)
- 👉 heart infection (endocarditis)

What causes the symptoms of sepsis?

In normal situation your immune system keeps an infection limited to one place. This is known as a localised infection. Your body produces white blood cells, which travel to the site of the infection to destroy the bacteria causing infection. A series of biological processes occur, such as tissue swelling, which helps fight the infection and prevents it spreading. This process is known as inflammation.

If your immune system is weak or an infection is particularly severe, it can quickly spread through the blood into other parts of the body. This causes the immune system to go into overdrive, and the inflammation affects the entire body. This can cause more problems than the initial infection, as widespread inflammation damages tissue and interferes with blood flow. The interruption in blood flow leads to a dangerous drop in blood pressure, which stops oxygen reaching your organs and tissues.

The Policy

As an organisation we recognise that individuals in our care are amongst those most at risk of developing sepsis. We therefore recognise the importance of both staff and management having an awareness of sepsis. Staff must raise any concerns of any sign of infection as soon as possible with their manager, as it is important that medical professionals should be contacted as soon as possible.

People at risk

Everybody is potentially at risk of developing sepsis from minor infections. However, some people are more vulnerable, including people who:

- 👉 have a medical condition that weakens their immune system – such as HIV or leukaemia

-  are receiving medical treatment that weakens their immune system – such as chemotherapy or long-term steroids
-  are very young or very old
-  are pregnant
-  have a long-term health condition, such as diabetes
-  have just had surgery, or have wounds or injuries as a result of an accident
-  are on mechanical ventilation – where a machine is used to help you breathe
-  have infusions or catheters attached to their skin
-  are genetically prone to infections

Signs and symptoms of sepsis

-  fever, above 103 degrees Fahrenheit / 39.4 degrees Celsius and shaking chills or, alternatively, a very low body temperature
-  decreased urination
-  rapid pulse. (heartbeat of 90 beats per minute or more)
-  rapid breathing. (greater than 20 breaths per minute)
-  nausea and vomiting
-  diarrhoea
-  the high likelihood or confirmed presence of an infection

Septic Shock

Septic shock is a life-threatening condition that happens when blood pressure drops to a dangerously low level after an infection. Any type of bacteria can cause the infection. Fungi such as candida and viruses can also be a cause, although this is rare. At first the infection can lead to a reaction called sepsis as described above. Left untreated, toxins produced by bacteria can damage the small blood vessels, causing them to leak fluid into the surrounding tissues. This can affect the heart's ability to pump blood to your organs, which lowers your blood pressure and blood does not reach vital organs, such as the brain and liver. People with a weakened immune system have an increased risk of developing septic shock. These include:

-  new-born babies
-  elderly people
-  pregnant women
-  people with long-term health conditions, such as [diabetes](#), [cirrhosis](#) or [kidney failure](#)
-  people with lowered immune systems, such as those with [HIV or AIDS](#) or those receiving [chemotherapy](#)

Symptoms of septic shock

Symptoms of septic shock include:

-  [low blood pressure \(hypotension\)](#) that makes the person feel dizzy when they stand up
-  breathing difficulties
-  a rapid change in mental state, such as confusion or disorientation
-  [diarrhoea](#)
-  abdominal pain with nausea and vomiting
-  cold, clammy and pale skin

Septic shock is a medical emergency; medical help must be summoned immediately if it is thought that the person in your care has septic shock.

Sepsis, is one of the top reasons individuals in care homes are sent to hospitals. Septic shock among the elderly results in death about 20% of the time, costing emotional and financial harm on families and the health care system overall.

Among the elderly, sepsis is most often caused by untreated bedsores, or pressure ulcers. Bedsores occur from remaining in one position for long periods of time, such as in a bed-ridden residents or wheelchair-users. The prolonged pressure on that area, commonly the buttocks, results in injuries to the skin and underlying tissue.

Bedsore often develop quickly, particularly among the elderly whose skin is already fragile, and can be difficult to treat. If the individual has any mobility issues, the risk of bedsores should be noted on their care plan. Furthermore, if staff fail to recognise, inform or adequately monitor bedsores diagnosis and treatment of sepsis may be delayed. This could lead to sepsis infection, and ultimately septic shock.

Sepsis prognosis

By identifying sepsis early, it is possible to increase an individual's chance of surviving. The longer the symptoms of sepsis go undiagnosed, the less likely a sufferer is of making a recovery.

Training

Staff are made aware of sepsis during their regular Infection Control training

Related Policies
Infection Control
Moving and handling
Prevention of Pressure ulcer