

Preventing Sepsis

Sepsis is a life-threatening, time-critical condition that arises when the body's response to an infection injures its own tissues and organs. If left untreated, sepsis can progress to multi-organ failure and death. Prompt recognition is essential. The risk of mortality from sepsis increases 8% every hour that treatment is delayed. As many as 80% of sepsis-related deaths may be prevented with rapid diagnosis and treatment.

Early detection and treatment is critical to:

- Decrease sepsis related morbidity and mortality
- Avoid long-term, health-related complications
- Potentially avoid sepsis-related hospitalizations

Who is at Risk for Sepsis?

Everyone is at risk, however, individuals at a *higher* risk for developing sepsis include:

- Individuals aged 65 or older
- Infants less than one year old
- Individuals with chronic illness such as diabetes or cancer
- Individuals with a weakened immune system
- Individuals recently hospitalized
- Individuals recovering from surgery

Early Signs of Sepsis

A person with early signs of sepsis would typically present with more than one of the following:

- Infection (confirmed or suspected)
- Fever
- Feeling very cold (hypothermia)
- Rapid heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Confusion or difficult to arouse
- Complaints of extreme or unusual pain
- Pale or discolored skin

Other early signs of sepsis may include:

- Decreased blood pressure
- Other signs of altered mental status
- Decreased urine output and/or dark or concentrated urine

Common Infectious Diseases that May Progress to Sepsis

- Lung infections (e.g., pneumonia)
- Skin infections (e.g., cellulitis)
- Urinary tract Infections
- Influenza
- C-diff (clostridium difficile enteritis)
- Abdominal infections
- Kidney infections
- Bloodstream infections

Prevention

Sepsis cannot always be prevented, but since sepsis is caused by an infection, steps can be taken to decrease the risk.

- Receive vaccinations that target a certain virus, such as vaccinations for influenza, pneumonia, and meningitis.
- Always wash your hands and wear gloves before touching an open wound. Even a small scratch can progress into sepsis if bacteria enters the wound.
- Notify the RN of any wounds regardless of size so that the RN can ensure the individual has been assessed and, if needed, adequate wound care is provided.
- Understand sepsis and recognize the symptoms. Periodic and refresher training should be provided to staff on sepsis prevention, as determined by nursing staff.
- Know that every minute counts. If you suspect sepsis, act fast. Sepsis is treatable if caught early.
- Ensure a Plan of Nursing Services (PONS) is in place for an existing infection, such as those listed above, and that it outlines signs and symptoms of sepsis and expectations for staff based on the severity of symptoms.

For more information on sepsis, visit www.sepsis.org.

Additionally, OPWDD has a training available on the Statewide Learning Management System, "Recognizing Sepsis as a Medical Emergency," which can be accessed at the following link: <https://nyslearn.ny.gov/index.html>.