About HQIN

The Health Quality Innovation Network (HQIN) brings together organizations and individuals who are making health care better for millions of Americans through funding provided by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Network of Quality Innovation and Improvement Contractors. Members include hospitals, providers, community-based organizations, health care associations and families.

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Health Quality Innovation Network

Patient and Family
Guide To Understanding Sepsis

What is Sepsis?

Sepsis is a very serious illness. It occurs when the body's response to infection rapidly spreads from its original site. Sepsis can quickly impact vital organs and tissues causing permanent damage or even death.

Why should I be concerned?

- 270,000 Americans die from Sepsis each year
- Sepsis is the leading cause of hospital admissions from nursing homes
- 15-50% of the people who are admitted to acute care hospitals, who are diagnosed with Sepsis, die
- Quick recognition of infections and the early warning signs of Sepsis leads to earlier treatment and the prevention of Severe Sepsis

How do you get Sepsis?

Sepsis can happen to anyone and can occur from even a minor infection. Not every infection leads to Sepsis. Many people can have a bladder infection, pneumonia, or a wound (sore) and the infection stays localized in the area where it first occurred. When the infection stays localized, people usually recover normally and do not develop Sepsis.

In cases where Sepsis develops, the body's response to the infection does not stay localized in the area where it first occurred and it begins to attack normal tissue and organs. When Sepsis begins to affect vital organs, it is called Severe Sepsis.

Groups of people most likely to get Sepsis:

- People over 65
- Babies under one year
- People who have suffered burns, trauma or have wounds
- People with catheters
- People with chronic illnesses such as kidney disease, cancer, diabetes, liver conditions or AIDS
- People with weakened immune systems such as those receiving treatments which diminish the body's ability to fight infection

Can you prevent Sepsis?

Preventing infection is one of the best ways to stop Sepsis from occurring. Clean all scrapes and wounds and wash your hands before touching open areas or providing care to a loved one. Handwashing is key to preventing the spread of infection.

The best way to prevent Severe Sepsis is through early detection. This includes identifying infections early and obtaining prompt treatment. Watching out for the signs of potential Sepsis is also very important.

What are the signs of potential Sepsis?

There is no single "sign" or "symptom" of Sepsis. It is a combination of symptoms AND the presence of an infection.

When a patient has a temperature over 100, a pulse rate over 100 and a blood pressure under 100, we need to consider two things:

1. Does the patient not look like themselves? Are they groggy, drowsy or confused? Is there a loss of appetite? Are they stumbling or falling? Is there something about their behavior that does not seem normal?
2. Sepsis is the result of an infection. So you want to identify any possible sources of infection. For example, does the patient have a wound, a respiratory illness or a bladder infection?

If you answered **YES** to these questions, the patient needs to be assessed for possible Sepsis and get immediate treatment according to the patient's advance directives.

What can I do as a family member?

First and foremost, you know your loved one. If you don't think the patient is behaving normally, speak up. Ask someone to check the patient. Don't be afraid to use the word "Sepsis." For example: *Mom has a bladder infection and she is just not acting like herself today. I am worried about Sepsis. Could you check her out?*

Second, make sure you wash your hands when visiting your loved one and before providing care. Make sure anyone who provides care to your loved one washes their hands as well.