

What is sepsis and why is it important - as a new parent - to talk about?

Sepsis is a rare but life-threatening condition that arises when the body responds to an infection by injuring its own tissues and organs. It's also sometimes called septicaemia (sept-a-see-mee-a) or blood poisoning.

Without quick treatment, sepsis can be very serious - it can result in organ failure and death. However, sepsis can be vague and hard to spot, with early symptoms often looking similar to things like flu, chest infections or tummy upsets.

Children and babies - especially those born prematurely - can be more susceptible to developing sepsis.

What should I do if my child has sepsis?

If you even suspect that your baby or child has sepsis, you need to act **IMMEDIATELY**. Call 999 and ask "could it be sepsis?"

Always trust your instincts - seek immediate medical advice if you just feel that there is something seriously wrong, or your baby or child:

- has *any* of the symptoms listed previously
- is getting worse or is sicker than you would expect

The NHS Healthier Together Sepsis page has excellent advice on what to do and where to go to seek help.

What are the signs and symptoms that I need to look out for?

Any child might have sepsis if he or she:

- is unwell with either a fever/high temperature (either now or in the last 24 hours) or a very low temperature
- is breathing very fast, or having difficulty breathing (e.g. 'grunting' or sucking in their tummy when they breathe)
- is having a 'fit' or a convulsion has skin, lips or tongue that is mottled, bluish or pale
- has a rash that does not fade when you press it
- is very lethargic or difficult to wake
- seems confused, does not make sense and/or has slurred speech
- has a cry that is not usual - it may be very weak or high-pitched
- feels abnormally cold to touch

Further, any child under five might have sepsis if he or she:

- is not feeding
- is vomiting repeatedly
- hasn't had a wee or a wet nappy for 12 hours

A baby or child with sepsis may have **SOME** but not **ALL** of these symptoms.

Are there any other symptoms I need to look out for?

Unfortunately, no.

However, there are ways that you can help to minimise the chances of your family developing infections which can lead to sepsis, including:

- ensuring that everyone - especially babies and children - are up-to-date with their vaccinations
- practicing good hygiene at home, especially in relation to hand washing and cleaning wounds
- ensuring that all prescribed antibiotics are taken in accordance with the instructions

Is there any way of preventing my baby or child getting sepsis?

Yes. You should also seek immediate medical assistance if you or another adult displays **ANY** of these symptoms:

**S**lurred speech or confusion  
**E**xtrême shivering or muscle pain  
**P**assing no urine (in a day)  
**S**evere breathlessness  
**I**t feels like you're going to die  
**S**kin is mottled or discoloured

Swelling, redness or pain around a wound can also be a sign of a sepsis infection.

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If a member of my family, or someone we know has sepsis, are we at risk?

No. You cannot catch sepsis from another person.

Find out more

Sources of further information:  
Sepsis

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sepsis/> - NHS Sepsis information page  
<https://sepsistrust.org/about/about-sepsis/> - The UK Sepsis Trust information page  
<https://what0-18.nhs.uk/parents/carers/worried-your-child-unwell/sepsis-spotting-signs> - NHS Healthier Together website Sepsis information page  
<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/vaccinations-and-immunisations-baby/> - NHS Start4Life information on baby's vaccinations and immunisations