

Suspected sepsis: recognition, diagnosis and early management

Information for the public

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Suspected sepsis: the care you should expect

Sepsis (also known as blood poisoning) is when your immune system overreacts to an infection and damages your body, rather than fighting the infection as it normally would. It is common and can be life threatening, so it must be identified and treated urgently.

Sepsis can be hard to spot. For information on symptoms and signs of sepsis, and information on what to do if you think you have sepsis, see the [NHS website page on sepsis](#).

Anyone with an infection can get sepsis, but some people have a higher risk than others. To ensure that you get the best possible care as soon as possible, tell your care team if you:

- are pregnant, or have given birth or had an abortion or miscarriage within the last 6 weeks
- have had surgery in the last 6 weeks
- have a weakened immune system because of an illness or because of medication you are taking.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people with suspected sepsis by making sure that:

- healthcare professionals know when to suspect sepsis
- healthcare professionals use the most accurate methods and tools to assess for sepsis
- people with suspected sepsis get the right assessments and treatments, at the right time (people at higher risk of severe illness or death will need more assessments and treatments, and they will need this more urgently)
- healthcare professionals know how to treat sepsis – people with suspected sepsis may need antibiotics, oxygen, or fluids in a drip
- people who have been assessed for sepsis or diagnosed with sepsis get the information and support they need.

Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your healthcare professional should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of any treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to treatments that worry you more than others?
- What happens if you don't want to have the tests or treatments offered to you?

If you need more support to understand the information you are given, tell your healthcare professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

Where can I find out more?

The [NHS website has more information about sepsis](#).

The organisations below can give you more advice and support.

- [UK Sepsis Trust](#), 0845 606 6255
- [Custers](#), 0300 30 20 121
- [Meningitis Research Foundation](#), 080 8800 3344
- [Meningitis Now](#), 0808 80 10 388
- [Macmillan Cancer Support](#) (for people at risk of neutropenic sepsis), 0808 808 00 00

You can also find information about people's experience of sepsis on [healthtalk](#).

NICE is not responsible for the content of these websites.

To share an experience of care you have received, contact your local [Healthwatch](#).

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by sepsis and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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