



Infection Prevention Control (IPC) Topic: Sepsis

Intro: Sepsis is the body's extreme response to an infection. It is a life-threatening medical emergency. Sepsis happens when an infection you already have triggers a chain reaction throughout your body. Most cases of sepsis start before a person goes to the hospital. Infections that lead to sepsis most often start in the lung, urinary tract, skin, or gastrointestinal tract. Without timely treatment, sepsis can rapidly lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.¹

What is the risk?⁴ The human body is full of reservoirs, places where germs like to live. A procedure done in health care that can push germs that are on the skin's surface or on the medical device you're using, into the person's body or bloodstream, causing an infection. Infections put your clients at risk for sepsis.

Highlights:

Who is at risk?

- Adults 65 or older
- People with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, lung disease, cancer, and kidney disease
- People who survived sepsis
- People with recent severe illness or hospitalization
- People with weakened immune systems
- Children younger than one

Signs and symptoms of sepsis

- High heart rate or weak pulse
- Extreme pain or discomfort
- Confusion or disorientation
- Clammy or sweaty skin
- Shortness of breath
- Fever, shivering, or feeling very cold

How can I as a healthcare worker get ahead of sepsis?²

- Know signs and symptoms to identify sepsis early and get immediate treatment.
- ACT FAST if you suspect sepsis.
- Prevent infections by following infection control practices (e.g., hand hygiene, appropriate indwelling medical device management, communicating signs and symptoms of infection to the healthcare professional overseeing care of the client, cleaning and disinfection, and ensuring clients receive recommended vaccines.

- Educate your clients, their families, and other staff about:
 - Preventing infections.
 - Keeping cuts and wounds clean until healed.
 - Managing chronic conditions.
 - Recognizing early signs and symptoms of worsening infection and sepsis.
 - High heart rate or weak pulse
 - Extreme pain or discomfort
 - Confusion or disorientation
 - Clammy or sweaty skin
 - Shortness of breath
 - Fever, shivering, or feeling very cold
 - Seeking immediate care if signs and symptoms are present.

What should be done if sepsis is suspected?²

- Know your facility's existing guidance for diagnosing and managing sepsis.
- Immediately alert the healthcare professional overseeing care of the client.
- Check client progress frequently. Treatment requires urgent medical care, usually in an intensive care unit in a hospital, and includes careful monitoring of vital signs and often antibiotics.
- Early and frequent reassessment of people with sepsis should be undertaken to determine the appropriate duration and type of therapy.

Summary:

Sepsis is a life-threatening medical emergency. In order to prevent sepsis, we must understand what the risk is, who is at risk, and what steps you can take to decrease the risk. Providing education of the most common signs and symptoms of sepsis is an important first step for all frontline staff, clients and their families to identify sepsis. We must ACT FAST if sepsis is suspected and immediately seek medical attention.

For more information on recognizing risk for Sepsis and related Project Firstline materials, see references below:

1. [Protect your Residents from Sepsis: For CNAs](#)
2. [Get Ahead of Sepsis Materials for Healthcare Providers | Sepsis | CDC](#)
3. [About Sepsis | Sepsis | CDC](#)
4. [Infection Control in Health Care: An Overview | Project Firstline | CDC](#)