Newsletter Article IPC Topic: Sepsis

Title: Early Sepsis recognition and prevention.

Recognizing where germs live and how they can spread can help you choose the right infection control actions to protect everyone. The human body is full of reservoirs, places where germs like to live. A procedure done in health care 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.[4]

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] People at increased risk of getting sick are older adults over 65 and children younger than one, persons with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, lung disease, cancer, and kidney disease and sepsis survivors and individuals who have had recent severe illness or hospitalization.

Early signs and symptoms of sepsis are often times missed. High heart rate or weak pulse, extreme pain or discomfort, confusion, clammy/sweaty skin, shortness of breath, fever, shivering, or feeling very cold.[3] If you suspect sepsis, it is important you act fast and notify a healthcare provider or instruct families to call 911 in a medical emergency. Another important step of stopping sepsis is prevention. One key factor in preventing sepsis growth is by following infection control practices. Practices that are important to follow include, 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 patients receiving care receive recommended vaccines.[2]

You may be wondering what education you can give persons receiving care to prevent sepsis? Let's go over how simple infection control steps can help stop the spread of sepsis. Prevent infections by keeping cuts and wounds clean until healed. Clean hands regularly. Manage chronic conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, and cancer. Monitor and report if any patients receiving care have the signs and symptoms listed above and notify healthcare provider immediately.[1,2]

To wrap up, healthcare workers can prevent sepsis by educating family, people receiving care, and staff and recognizing the early signs and symptoms. Are you interested in sharing infection prevention tips with your staff? Our Project Firstline team has quick and simple training resources available on sepsis as well as other IPC training topics. Contact us at dohpfl@nd.gov to get training resources you can use today!

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