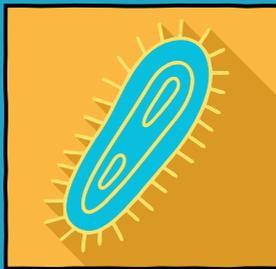


# Groundswell

Out of homelessness

## Health guide sepsis



### What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a life-threatening condition that happens when the body's response to an infection causes damage to its own tissues and organs.

It occurs when the body's immune system – which normally helps to protect us and fight infection – goes into overdrive. It can lead to shock, organ failure and sometimes death - it is vital that sepsis is recognised early and treated quickly.

Sepsis can affect anyone but is more common in people with underlying health conditions, older adults and children. Sepsis always starts with an infection and can be triggered by any infection, including chest infections, TB and Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs). It is not known why some people develop sepsis in response to these common infections and others don't, which sadly means there is no way to prevent or predict it.

## What are the symptoms in adults?

**Seek medical help urgently if you (or another adult) develop any of these SEPSIS signs:**

- Slurred speech or confusion.
- Extreme shivering or muscle pain.
- Passing no urine (in a day).
- Severe breathlessness.
- It feels like you're going to die.
- Skin mottled (blotchy) or discoloured.

**There are lots of possible symptoms of sepsis. They can be like symptoms of other conditions, for example:**

- Flu-like symptoms
- Chesty cough
- High temperature
- Feeling cold and clammy
- Fast heart rate or fast breathing
- Feeling dizzy or faint
- A rash that doesn't fade
- Diarrhea.

**These symptoms can also be more common in people affected by homelessness, living with poor health or using substances so it can be hard to spot.**

**If you think someone has sepsis, don't wait. If someone has one or more of the sepsis symptoms, call 999 or go straight to A&E and ask, 'Could it be sepsis?'**

**If you're concerned about an infection, call 111 or see your GP and ask, 'Could it be sepsis?'**

## What makes you more at risk of getting sepsis?

Some people are more likely to get an infection that could lead to sepsis, including:

- People with diabetes.
- People with a weakened immune system, for example people having chemotherapy or who recently had an organ transplant, are on long term steroids or on drugs to treat cancer or other conditions.
- People with a genetic serious illness or condition that affects their immune system, such as leukemia or cancer.
- People with Down's syndrome or sickle cell disease.
- People who are malnourished (your body hasn't had enough food).
- People who have serious liver disease.
- People who have recently had surgery or a serious illness.
- Older adults.
- Women who are pregnant or have just given birth, had a miscarriage or had an abortion.
- Babies, especially if they're born early or their mother had an infection while pregnant.

**You cannot catch sepsis from another person. It happens when your body overreacts to an infection.**

## How is sepsis treated?

**Sepsis needs immediate treatment** in hospital because it can get worse quickly.

You should get antibiotics within 1 hour of arriving at hospital.

If sepsis is not treated early, it can turn into septic shock and cause your organs to fail. This is life-threatening.

It is important to tell health care professionals how you are feeling (symptoms), about any underlying health conditions you have, if you're using drugs and any medication you are on. This will help with making an early diagnosis and in getting treatment as quickly as possible.

You may need other tests or treatments depending on your symptoms, including:

- Treatment in an intensive care unit.
- A machine to help you breathe (ventilator).
- Surgery to remove areas of infection.
- You may need to stay in hospital for several weeks.

## Recovery

**Most people make a full recovery from sepsis but it can take time.** You might continue to have physical and emotional symptoms. These can last for months, or even years.

These long-term effects are sometimes called post-sepsis syndrome, and can include:

- Feeling very tired and weak, and difficulty sleeping
- Lack of appetite
- Getting ill more often
- Changes in your mood, or anxiety or depression
- Nightmares or flashbacks
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

[Find more information on, and support with sepsis](#), on the Sepsis Trust website.

**Everyone has the right to see a GP. You do not need ID or a fixed address to register with a GP and your immigration status does not matter. Always remember your visit to the GP is confidential.**

**It may be helpful to tell the medical professional if you:**

- Are worried or have experienced any sexual violence or other trauma, which may make the appointment difficult for you.
- Have a physical or mental health condition.
- Have had a bad experience with medical appointments before and you can let them know what they can do to make you feel more comfortable.
- Would like to be seen by a medical professional of a certain gender.
- May have issues coming to all, or some of, your appointments.

Everyone has the right to good health and to access healthcare. People experiencing homelessness face health inequalities, they are often excluded from information and services. That's why Groundswell produces accessible health guidance for people experiencing homelessness, so they can make informed decisions about their health.

All our health guides are created alongside people with experience of homelessness and reviewed by relevant professionals.



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