

Sepsis

Sepsis can happen when your body responds to a severe infection or bacteremia – the presence of bacteria in your bloodstream. Sepsis can be deadly. Blood pressure may drop and the lungs and kidneys may start to fail. Emergency care for sepsis is crucial.



To treat sepsis, antibiotics and fluids may be given through an intravenous (IV) line.

Risk factors

Those most at risk for sepsis are:

- Infants or older adults
- People who have an illness that weakens their immune system, such as cancer, AIDS, or diabetes
- People being treated with chemotherapy medications or radiation, which weakens the immune system
- People who have had a transplant
- People with an infection such as pneumonia, meningitis, or a urinary tract infection

When to go to the emergency department (ED)

Sepsis is a medical emergency. Go to the nearest emergency department if a fever is present with any of these symptoms:

- Chills and shaking
- Rapid heartbeat and breathing; shortness of breath
- Severe nausea or uncontrolled vomiting
- Confusion, dizziness
- Decreased urination
- Severe pain, including in the back or joints

What to expect in the ED

- Blood and urine tests are done to look for the presence of bacteria and to check for the presence of organ failure.
- A **blood culture** may be done. In this test, a blood sample is sent to a lab, where it's placed in a special container. Any bacteria in the blood should grow in 24 hours.
- X-rays may be taken or other imaging tests may be done.

A person with sepsis will be admitted to the hospital and treated with antibiotics. Treatment may also include oxygen and intravenous fluids.