

Protect yourself and your family from sepsis.

What is sepsis?

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. Infections that lead to sepsis most often start in the genital tract, lung, skin, or gastrointestinal tract. Without fast treatment with antibiotics, sepsis can quickly lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

What causes sepsis?

Infections put you and your family at risk for sepsis. When germs get into a person's body, they can cause an infection. If that infection doesn't stop, it can cause sepsis.

Can mothers spread sepsis to their babies or others?

No, pregnant women and women who recently gave birth (postpartum) cannot spread sepsis to their babies or others. However, the underlying infection could spread. Sepsis during pregnancy can harm the pregnancy and baby.

Who is at risk for sepsis?

Anyone can get an infection, and almost any infection can lead to sepsis. Pregnant and postpartum women are at higher risk of infection due to changes in their immune system and needing medical procedures during their pregnancy. **Other groups of people who are at higher risk for sepsis include:**



Children younger than one



People who survived sepsis



People with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, lung disease, cancer, and kidney disease



People with recent severe illness, surgery, or hospital care



People with weakened immune systems

**GET AHEAD
OF SEPSIS**

KNOW THE RISKS.
SPOT THE SIGNS.
ACT FAST.

Anyone can get an infection, and almost any infection can lead to sepsis. Each year:

- About **1.7 million adults** in the U.S. develop sepsis.
- At least **350,000 adults** who develop sepsis die during their hospitalization or are discharged to hospice.
- **1 in 3 people** who dies in a hospital had sepsis during their hospital stay.

How can I get ahead of sepsis?

You can take specific steps to reduce your risk of sepsis, such as:

1 Prevent infections

Talk to a healthcare professional about steps you can take **to prevent infections that can lead to sepsis, including:**

- During periods of high respiratory virus activity, consider wearing a mask when around people outside your household.
- During regular visits, ask your OB/GYN about recommended vaccines. Vaccinations can help prevent or reduce the risk of infections that could lead to sepsis.
- Take good care of other medical conditions, such as diabetes, lung disease, cancer, and kidney disease.

2 Practice good hygiene

- Keep hands clean.
- Keep minor cuts and wounds clean and covered until healed.
- Follow instructions from a healthcare professional about how to care for larger wounds or incisions, such as a Cesarean delivery incision. Review the discharge instructions and how to care for your incision before you leave the medical facility. Make sure you have the name and phone number of who to contact if you have questions or problems after you get home.

3 Know the signs and symptoms

Be vigilant of specific pregnancy-related conditions that can increase risk of infection. These conditions include your water breaking early, recent Cesarean delivery, or retained tissue from the pregnancy that may place you at higher risk of getting an infection.

A woman who is pregnant or postpartum with sepsis might have one or more of the following signs or symptoms:

- Clammy or sweaty skin
- Extreme pain or discomfort
- Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Severe vaginal bleeding
- Redness or drainage from Cesarean delivery incision
- Confusion
- Fever, shivering, or feeling very cold
- High heart rate or low blood pressure
- Breast redness or pain
- Shortness of breath

4 Act fast

Sepsis is a medical emergency. If you or your loved one has an infection that's not getting better or is getting worse, **act fast.** Get medical care **immediately.** Ask a healthcare professional, "Could this infection be leading to sepsis?" and if you should go to the emergency room. A healthcare professional should immediately evaluate and treat people who might have sepsis.

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Learn more at
cdc.gov/sepsis

