

Sepsis Explained

This leaflet briefly answers common questions and worries in people who have had severe sepsis:

- What is sepsis?
- Who gets sepsis?
- How does sepsis occur?
- How do I keep myself safe?

Sepsis Explained

This leaflet can be made available in alternative languages / formats on request.

*如有需要，本传单可提供其他语言/版式
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Na żądanie ta ulotka może zostać udostępniona w innych językach/formatkach.

Whiston Hospital
Warrington Road
Prescot, Merseyside, L35 5DR
Telephone: 0151 426 1600

St Helens Hospital
Marshall Cross Road,
St Helens, Merseyside, WA9 3DA
Telephone: 01744 26633

 /sthnhs  @sthnhs
www.sthk.nhs.uk

Author: Intensive Care Consultant
Department: Intensive Care
Document Number: STHK1223
Version: 2
Review Date: 1/12/2022

What is sepsis?

Sepsis occurs when the body's natural reaction to an infection is so strong that it damages parts of the body.

The body may then "shut down" parts of the body to protect them; such as the lungs, heart, liver, kidneys or brain.

As a result, these organs need support from medication and machines until the body has had time to recover.

This is why you were admitted to Intensive Care, as that is where this support can be given.

Who gets sepsis?

Anyone can get sepsis, but some people have more difficulty in fighting off infection on their own because of:

- Chemotherapy
- Severe injury
- Burns
- Taking steroid medication
- Frail people
- or those with a poor diet or high alcohol intake

How does sepsis occur?

Usually when someone catches an infection their body will get rid of the germs and the person will get better without any help.

Sometimes people may need help to recover from the infection with antibiotics.

Rarely the germs may spread into the blood stream.

This can occur no matter where the infection starts, as the smallest blood vessels within the body fail to keep the germs out.

The body reacts by producing germ killing cells and chemicals.

The reaction may be very strong and the body's natural chemicals then cause damage to the organs (heart, lungs, kidneys, liver and brain).

A variety of symptoms may then occur:

- Low blood pressure
- A weakened heart
- Swelling of the body
- Difficulty in breathing
- Kidney failure, confusion
- Hallucinations
- and not remembering what happened.

How do I keep safe?

Once you have fully recovered from sepsis you are no more likely than anyone else to develop it again.

You will be advised on how to protect yourself by eating healthily and avoiding cigarettes and alcohol.

This will help your body fight off germs and reduce your chances of becoming ill again.

If you do develop another infection that is not getting better in a couple of days, see your doctor.

You cannot catch sepsis from door handles, toilet seats or by touching other people.

Once you are back to your normal strength, you do not need to avoid people with colds.

However, be sensible:

- Wash your hands before eating and after going to the toilet or gardening etc.
- Soap and water are the best way to clean your hands.
- Alcohol gels can be used when soap and water is not available.