

## The importance of asking: could it be sepsis?



Sepsis is an indiscriminate killer, claiming young and old lives alike and affecting the previously fit and healthy. Although sepsis occurs less frequently in children than in adults, sepsis can happen to everyone, and the symptoms in adults and children differ. Sepsis can happen as a response to any infection or injury, anywhere in the body. It can result from:

- ▶▶ A chest infection causing pneumonia
- ▶▶ A urine infection in the bladder
- ▶▶ A problem in the abdomen, such as a burst ulcer or a hole in the bowel
- ▶▶ An infected cut or bite
- ▶▶ A wound from trauma or surgery
- ▶▶ A leg ulcer or cellulitis.

To help raise the profile of the condition, the UK Sepsis Trust has been working with Coronation Street. In a storyline that will span the whole summer, a young boy will develop sepsis. As the plot unfolds, it will remind us of the devastating human cost of sepsis. Individuals and families have their lives torn apart by the condition — more people than breast, bowel, prostate cancer and road accidents combined.

We have been working very closely with the writers and the technical team from Coronation Street to ensure that the subject matter is dealt with accurately and sensitively. It will help to raise the profile of a condition that affects so many people yet, until now, has been so poorly recognised. Health is a shared responsibility and, together, we aim to empower both families and health professionals to 'think sepsis' and to change the way sepsis is handled in the UK.

### SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS OF SEPSIS

Sepsis presents differently in adults and children and knowing the symptoms is crucial. Seek medical help urgently if an adult develop any of these 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 or discoloured

- ▶▶ How to spot sepsis in children.


If your child is unwell with either a fever or very low temperature (or has had a fever in the last 24 hours), call 999 and just ask: could it be sepsis?

A child may have sepsis if he/she:

- ▶▶ Is breathing very fast
- ▶▶ Has a 'fit' or convulsion
- ▶▶ Looks mottled, bluish, or pale
- ▶▶ Has a rash that does not fade when you press it
- ▶▶ Is very lethargic or difficult to wake
- ▶▶ Feels abnormally cold to touch.

We still don't know why some people who get an infection develop sepsis and others don't. People are more likely to develop sepsis after a viral illness like a cold, or a minor injury. But it can affect anyone, regardless of age or state of health. However, some people are more likely to get sepsis, including those who:

- ▶▶ Are very young or very old
- ▶▶ Are diabetic
- ▶▶ Are on long-term steroids or on drugs to treat cancer or other conditions
- ▶▶ Have had an organ transplant and are on anti-rejection drugs
- ▶▶ Are malnourished (your body hasn't had enough food)
- ▶▶ Have serious liver disease
- ▶▶ Have a serious illness which affects your immune system (the way your body protects itself from infection), such as leukaemia
- ▶▶ Have an infection or a complication after an operation
- ▶▶ Are pregnant or have just given birth.

Our aim is to end preventable deaths from sepsis and improve outcomes for survivors, by instigating political change, educating healthcare professionals, raising public awareness and providing support for those affected by this devastating condition. We estimate that better awareness could save at least 14,000 lives every year and knowing the symptoms in adults and children and the demographics most at risk of developing sepsis is a step towards ending unnecessary deaths from sepsis. 

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