
Can Sepsis Cause a Rash?

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IN THIS ARTICLE

[What Is Sepsis?](#)

[Causes](#)

[Symptoms](#)

[Diagnosis](#)

[Treatment](#)

[VIEW ALL](#)



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Sepsis, which is also called blood poisoning, is the body's severe reaction to an infection. A rash, changes in mental state, fever, and low blood pressure are four early signs of sepsis. This infection is life-threatening and can be fatal if it's untreated. ^[1]

Sepsis is one of the oldest described illnesses (first described back in 400 BCE), and it's also been on the rise since 2000. ^[2] At least 1.7 million adults in the United States develop sepsis each year. About 350,000 of those who develop sepsis die during their hospitalization or are discharged to hospice each year. ^[3]

What Is Sepsis?

Sepsis is a potentially life-threatening condition caused by an extreme reaction the body has to infection. It happens when an infection you triggers a chain reaction throughout the body. ^[3] Sepsis is

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Seeking medical attention right away is of the utmost importance once you see symptoms, which can include a rash, fever, mental decline, and fatigue. Sepsis can progress rapidly. Blood pressure drops, the heart weakens, and the body spirals toward septic shock in severe cases. Multiple organs—lungs, kidneys, liver—may quickly fail, which is usually fatal. ^[5]

Causes

Sepsis is usually caused by [bacterial infections](#), but viral or fungal infections can also be the culprit. The body normally releases chemicals into the blood to fight these infections. These chemicals can trigger widespread inflammation, blood clots, and leaky blood vessels. Blood flow becomes impaired, which deprives organs of nutrients and oxygen and leads to organ damage. ^[5]

Is Sepsis Contagious?

You can't contract or spread sepsis from or to other people. Sepsis can be caused by an infection, and you can spread some infections to other people.

Risk Factors

Anyone can get an infection that could potentially lead to sepsis. Some people are at greater risk than others, including people who: ^[3]

- Are younger than 1 or 65 or older

disease

Have a history of sepsis

Sepsis Symptoms

Common symptoms of sepsis can include: ^[1]

Changes in mental state, such as confusion or delirium

Fever or chills

Hypothermia, or low body temperature

Lightheadedness

[Low blood pressure](#), which causes shock

Rapid heartbeat

Skin rash

Warm skin

Many of these symptoms are also common in other conditions. This can make sepsis challenging to recognize, especially in its early stages. ^[5]

Sepsis Rash

One of the symptoms of sepsis is a [rash](#) that doesn't fade when you press it. A red mark may appear if an infection travels through the lymph nodes to other body parts.

Lymphangitis, or an infection of the lymph vessels, is a complication of some bacterial infections that may cause a rash. It may be a sign that the

SKIP TO CONTENT [leading into the blood and may develop into sepsis. Red](#)

There's a simple way to track whether redness around a wound is spreading, which could signal infection. "Take a pen and mark around the site. Draw a border around the redness," [Frank Esper, MD](#), pediatric infectious disease specialist at Cleveland Clinic, told *Health*.

"Does the redness go beyond that mark [the next day]? If you're on antibiotics and the redness goes beyond those markings, we're on the wrong antibiotics, or we need something more powerful," said Dr. Esper.

Diagnosis

A healthcare provider will collect your health history and perform tests to check for signs of infection or organ damage. They can also identify the bacteria that caused the infection that led to sepsis. ^[7]

Diagnostic tests can include: ^[1]

- Blood tests, which can include a platelet or white blood cell count

- Imaging tests, such as a [CT scan](#) or X-ray

- Kidney function tests

- Physical exam to check your vital signs

A healthcare provider can also use a scoring system to determine the severity of sepsis. This scoring system shows if the function of an organ is declining and notes the number of organ systems affected. ^[5]

Sepsis Treatment

Fast detection and initial treatment of sepsis are critical. Sepsis treatment typically includes: ^[7]

Individual immune responses and responses to treatment such as antibiotics may vary. Scientists are continually trying to find new therapies and determine what people are likely to benefit most from certain approaches.^[5]

Complications

Sepsis is a life-threatening infection that can cause organ failure or be fatal if it's not treated promptly. A lack of blood flow to the organs, such as the brain, heart, and kidneys, can result in damage.^[1]

Other long-term complications of sepsis can include:^[8]

- Amputation

- Decreased cognitive functioning

- [Kidney failure](#)

- Nightmares

- Panic attacks

- Reduced self-esteem

- Respiratory problems

- Severe muscle or joint pain

- Trouble sleeping or staying asleep

Prevention

You can help prevent sepsis by taking steps to protect yourself from

Practicing good hygiene, including washing your hands with soap and water regularly

Staying up-to-date with vaccines

Taking care of open wounds by keeping them clean and covered

A Quick Review

Being educated about the symptoms of sepsis and seeking out medical treatment are critical to successful recovery from sepsis. Early signs include a rash, changes in mental state, fever, and low blood pressure.

Sepsis is the most severe reaction to an infection. It's a life-threatening medical emergency and can rapidly lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death if it's left untreated.

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surface of
clammy, cold
hands

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 Health Overview Illustration - Sepsis

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woman scratching her forearm.

 Adult applying ointment to arm of child with chickenpox

 person washing hands to prevent getting a bacterial infection

 A healthcare worker prepares to administer a monkeypox

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Listeria

 Doctor
examining
patient's arm

 Health
Illustration
Overview - Hand
Foot and Mouth

 Close-up of a
ringed red rash
from a tick bite.

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