

Sepsis During Pregnancy and After Childbirth

Sepsis

Sepsis is a serious medical condition triggered by an infection that can lead to tissue damage, organ failure or death.

It can be caused by an infection related to pregnancy or childbirth, as well as pneumonia or a urinary tract infection. It's not known why infection causes sepsis in one person but not another.

Sepsis can cause:

- low blood pressure
- a high heart rate (usually more than 100 beats per minute during pregnancy and after childbirth)
- trouble breathing and low oxygen levels in your blood
- little or no urine output
- confusion or coma.

Sepsis can be life-threatening and needs to be treated right away.

Who Can Get Sepsis

Any woman who is pregnant, or who has given birth or had a miscarriage is at risk for developing sepsis. Women who may be more likely to get it are women who:

- have diabetes
- are overweight
- have invasive tests or procedures during pregnancy such as an amniocentesis or any surgery

- have a Cesarean birth
- have a long labor
- have a long period of time between “rupture of membranes” (or “water breaking”) and giving birth
- have an infection after a vaginal birth
- have mastitis (infection of the breast).

Signs and Symptoms of Sepsis

Signs and symptoms of sepsis include:

- fever
- chills, shivering or feeling very cold
- clammy or sweaty skin
- fast breathing
- high heart rate (more than 90 beats per minute when you are not pregnant or more than 100 beats per minute during pregnancy)
- feeling short of breath
- rash
- confusion or disorientation
- feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- feeling sleepy or having trouble waking up
- having a lot of pain or discomfort.

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What To Do

- **If you are in the hospital:** tell a member of your health care team as soon as you start having symptoms.
- **If you are at home:** call 911 or have someone drive you to a hospital Emergency Department right away.

How Your Doctor Confirms Sepsis

- Your doctor will check you for a fever, low blood pressure, fast heart rate and fast breathing rate.
- You will have lab tests (blood, mucus, urine or all) to check for signs of infection.
- You may have X-rays or scans to look at your heart or other organs.

How to Treat Sepsis

- You will need to be treated in the hospital.
- You will receive antibiotics (medicine).
- You may receive other medicines to help your heart, kidneys or lungs.
- You may need extra oxygen, intravenous (IV) fluids or other types of treatment.
- Your doctor will work to find the location of the infection. If you have tissue damage caused by the infection, you may need surgery.

Your doctor will talk with you and members of your care circle (family members or friends) about your treatment.

Long-term Effects of Sepsis

Most women who get sepsis recover and their lives return to normal.

In rare cases, women could have some type of long-lasting organ damage. For example, sepsis can lead to kidney failure in someone who had kidney problems.

How to Prevent Sepsis

- Get vaccinated as recommended by your health care provider.
- Prevent infections that can lead to sepsis by:
 - keeping scrapes and wounds clean
 - taking antibiotics as prescribed
 - washing your hands often.
- Get help right away if you have the signs and symptoms listed on page 1.