



## Recognising Sepsis in a child

### What is sepsis?

**Sepsis is a rare but serious life-threatening condition that arises when the body's response to infection causes injury to its own tissues and organs (NICE, 2017). It is also known as blood poisoning or septicaemia.**

Sepsis needs treatment in hospital straight away because it can get worse quickly. It is important to recognise the signs as early as possible.

Most people make a full recovery from sepsis - but it can take time. Some children are more susceptible to life-threatening infections that could lead to sepsis. These include:

- Children under the age of 1 year
- Children who are immunocompromised, for example they:
  - are being treated for cancer with chemotherapy
  - are taking long-term steroids
  - are diabetic
  - have sickle cell disease
- Children who have had recent surgery or invasive procedures, in the last six weeks

- Children with a breach of skin integrity such as cuts, burns, blisters or skin infections
- Children with indwelling lines or catheters.

**Go straight to A&E or call 999 if your child has any of these symptoms:**

- looks mottled, bluish or pale
- is very lethargic or difficult to wake
- feels abnormally cold to touch
- is breathing very fast
- has a rash that does not fade when you press it
- has a fit or convulsion.

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**For additional Parent Tips see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)**

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There are additional factors that make babies less than 1-month old more susceptible to life-threatening infections and these include:

- Group B streptococcal infection in this pregnancy or in a previous baby
- Premature rupture of membranes
- Prematurity greater than 37 weeks
- Maternal fever of 38°C during labour
- Suspected intra-amniotic infection
- If the mother has received treatment for suspected Sepsis in the 24 hours before or after birth
- Suspected infection in another baby in the case of a multiple pregnancy.

## Get medical advice urgently from NHS 111:

If your child has any of the symptoms listed below, is getting worse or is sicker than you'd expect (even if their temperature falls), trust your instincts and seek medical advice urgently from NHS 111.

### Temperature

- A temperature over 38°C in babies under 3 months
- A temperature over 39°C in babies aged 3 to 6 months
- Any high temperature in a child who cannot be encouraged to show interest in anything
- A low temperature (below 36°C – check three times in a 10-minute period).

### Breathing

- Finding it much harder to breathe than normal – looks like hard work
- Making “grunting” noises with every breath
- Cannot say more than a few words at once (for older children who normally talk)
- Breathing that obviously “pauses”.

### Toilet/nappies

- Not had a wee or wet nappy for 12 hours.

### Eating and drinking

- New baby under 1-month old with no interest in feeding
- Not drinking for more than 8 hours (when awake)
- Bile-stained (green), bloody or black vomit/sick.

### Activity and body

- Soft spot on a baby's head is bulging
- Eyes look “sunken”
- Child cannot be encouraged to show interest in anything
- Baby is floppy
- Weak, “whining” or continuous crying in a younger child
- Older child who is confused
- Not responding or very irritable
- Stiff neck, especially when trying to look up and down.

### Helpful Points for Parents

1. Parents should keep their child away from childcare settings until the fever has resolved (NICE, 2017).
2. Remember that not all fevers in children will develop into serious or life-threatening infections and children can be safely cared for at home. A good source of advice is <http://bit.ly/2RXuWC2> and there is a video called “Spotting Sepsis in under 5s”.
3. Giving regular fluids to children, including breastmilk, is really important.
4. Liquid paracetamol and ibuprofen are safe medicines to use if your child has pain or a fever (follow the manufacturer's instructions). Babies older than 2 months may have paracetamol and babies older than 3 months and weighing more than 5 kgs can also have ibuprofen. Seek advice before giving a child ibuprofen if they are asthmatic. Paracetamol and ibuprofen should not be given to infants or children at the same time. It is advisable to give medicine that states it is “sugar-free” and always check that you give the right dose for the age of your child (note medicines are available in different strengths - always check the dose on the bottle). Always remember to store medicines safely away from children. For help on using a syringe to give medicines to children visit: [bit.ly/2lYmkyy](http://bit.ly/2lYmkyy) (accessed 05/03/2020).
5. If your child is unwell, it is important to check on them regularly during the day and night.
6. If your child has a raised temperature, it is recommended to put them in light clothing.

### Further reading:

NICE guidance: <http://bit.ly/39gLwEa>

Public Health England (2017) Sepsis in children - Information for health visitors and school nurses: <http://bit.ly/2GWuHSL>

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