



HSE National Patient Safety Alert

Sepsis in Children and Young People

(005/2023)

What does it mean for me as a patient, parent or guardian?

About National Patient Safety Alerts

HSE *National Patient Safety Alerts* (NPSA) are high-priority communications about patient safety issues, which require HSE services and HSE funded agencies to take specific action within an identified timeframe. They are developed with relevant people including subject matter experts and patient representatives.

What is the safety issue?

Currently, there are considerable numbers of children and young people presenting to health services with signs and symptoms of infection, including viral respiratory infections. Most cases of infection lead to a full recovery. However, sepsis is a serious potential complication of infection that can be hard to recognise. Therefore, early recognition and treatment of sepsis are vital to improving patient outcomes.



Sepsis can cause significant illness and death for anyone including children (paediatric) and young adult patients. Recent reviews of children and young people presenting with sepsis have shown us where we can improve care in busy and overcrowded emergency settings.

This alert was issued to increase healthcare staff awareness of sepsis by sharing learning insights from sepsis case reviews. It also reminds staff of the tools and resources available to support them in recognising and treating patients with suspected sepsis quickly and appropriately. An additional public awareness campaign is planned for early 2024.

What should I look out for?

Sepsis symptoms can be different in babies and children

Some signs and symptoms of sepsis in children and young adults include:

- Very fast breathing
- Having fits or convulsions
- Skin that looks mottled (patchy, irregular colour), bluish or pale
- A rash that does not fade when you press it
- Being unusually sleepy and difficult to wake
- Feeling unusually cold when you touch them
- Has passed no urine for more than 12 hours

In young children under 5 years old watch in particular for the following:

- Not feeding
- Vomiting repeatedly
- Dry nappies when you change them / No wet nappy for the last 12 hours

What can I do?

The risk of sepsis in children and young adults can be reduced by:

- keeping up to date with vaccines, particularly for babies and children
- keeping clean and washing hands regularly
- taking care of any wounds
- visiting your GP early if you suspect your child may have an infection
- following the instructions when antibiotics are being taken, including finishing the course, even if your child feels better
- telling your GP or hospital staff if you are worried about, or have noticed changes in your child that don't seem right
- asking your GP or hospital staff “*Could this be sepsis?*”



Where can I get more information?



For queries on this or any HSE NPSA email patientsafetytogether@hse.ie

