



**Health Quality &
Safety Commission**
Te Tāhū Hauora



Sepsis
Trust NZ



Could it be sepsis?

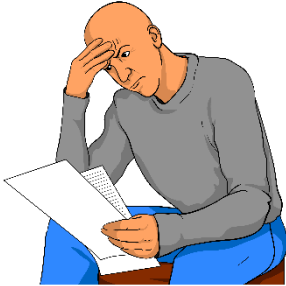


Published: August 2026



**New Zealand
Government**
Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa

Before you start



Some of the information in this document may make people:

- upset
- worried.



This information is not meant to scare anyone.



This information does not mean the things in this document will happen to:

- you
- people you know.



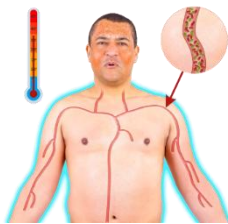
If you are worried you can talk to your:

- whānau / family
- friends
- doctor.



What you will find in here

Page number:



What is sepsis?4



Who can get sepsis?.....8



What does sepsis do
to the body?16

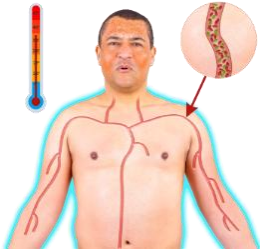


Sepsis is an emergency20



Where to find more Easy Read
information about sepsis21

What is sepsis?



Sepsis can happen when your body reacts to an **infection**.

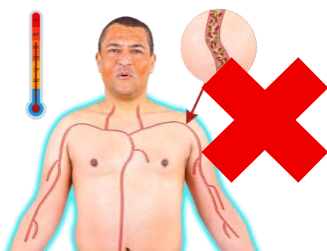


An **infection** is when you get sick from germs getting into your body.

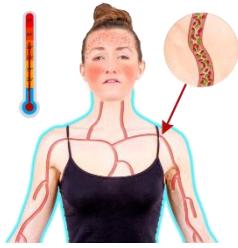


Some infections that can lead to sepsis are:

- chest infections like pneumonia
- urine infections / UTIs
- skin infections or infected cuts / wounds.



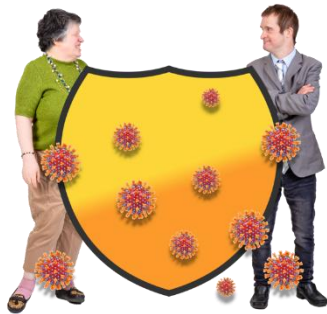
Not everyone who gets an infection will get sepsis.



Sepsis happens when your **immune system** responds to an infection in a way that is:



- extreme / far worse than it should be
- toxic / poisonous to your body.

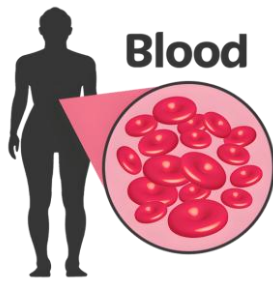


An **immune system** is what supports your body to get better when it is sick with something like an infection.



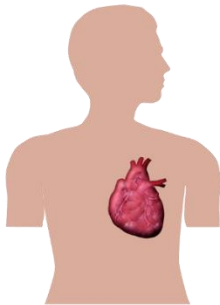
Sepsis itself is **not** an infection.

Sepsis happens when your immune system hurts your body badly instead of getting rid of the infection.



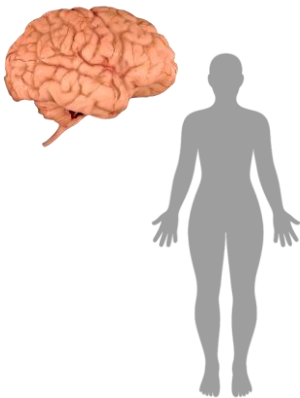
Sepsis can hurt parts of your body that keep you alive like your:

- blood
- **organs**
- **nervous system.**

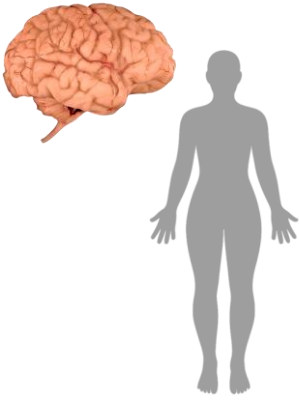


Organs are important parts of your body that keep you alive like your:

- heart
- brain
- kidneys.



Your **nervous system** sends information between your brain and the rest of your body.



The nervous system helps you:

- think
- feel
- move
- see / hear
- feel pain
- breathe
- control your heartbeat
- digest / process food.

Who can get sepsis?



Sepsis can happen to anyone.

Some people are more likely to get sepsis than others like:



- people over 60 years old
- children under the age of 12 especially:
 - babies
 - children who are not **fully immunised**.

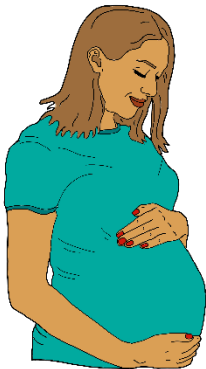


Fully immunised means someone has had all their **vaccinations**.



Vaccinations are medicines given through a needle that support your body to fight some sicknesses like:

- the flu
- COVID-19.



Other people more likely to get sepsis are wāhine / women who:

- are pregnant
- have just had:
 - a baby
 - an **abortion**
 - a **miscarriage**.



Abortion is when you stop your pregnancy before the baby is born.

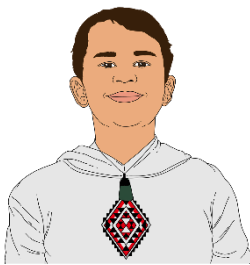


Miscarriage is when a pregnancy ends by accident before the baby is born.

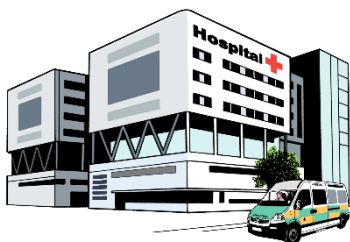


Other people who are more likely to get sepsis are:

- Māori
- Pacific peoples.

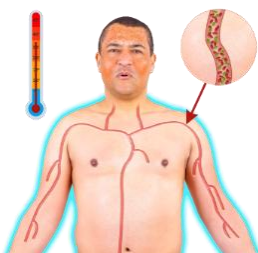


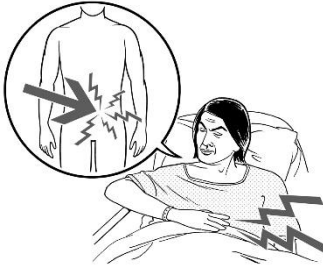
People in these 2 groups who are young are even more likely to get sepsis.



Other people who are more likely to get sepsis are people who have:

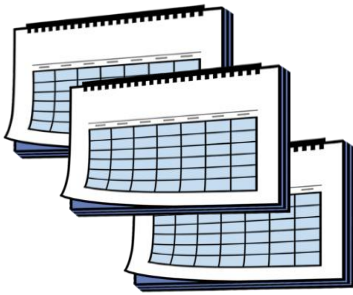
- just left hospital after staying there
- had sepsis before.





Other people who are more likely to get sepsis are people:

- with **chronic diseases**
- who do not have a good immune system.



A **chronic disease** is a health condition that lasts longer than 3 months.

What does sepsis look like?



Sepsis can get worse very quickly.

It is easier to treat sepsis if it is found early.



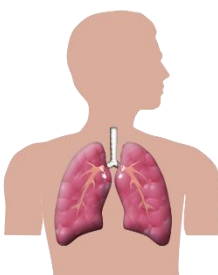
Sometimes it can be hard to know if something is sepsis.



Signs you might have sepsis are things like:



- feeling cold / shivery
- feeling hot / flushed
- your skin being blotchy / having red patches that do not go away
- finding it hard to breathe.





Other signs you might have sepsis are things like:

- your body hurting
- being very tired
- not feeling like eating
- a tummy ache that might also cause:



- vomiting / throwing up
- diarrhoea / runny poos that make you need to go to the toilet a lot more



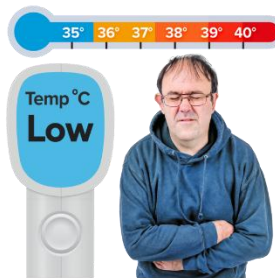
- not going for a wee for more than 12 hours
- not weeing very much when you do go to the toilet.





Other signs you might have sepsis are things like:

- feeling confused
 - doing things you would not usually do
 - your speech being slurred / sounding funny
 - your body temperature being:
 - very high
- or**
- very low.



You might not have all these signs if you have sepsis.



You may also have different signs because of the kind of infection.



Sometimes the signs of sepsis are hard to see.



Some people may say they just feel unwell / sick.

Ask for help if someone:

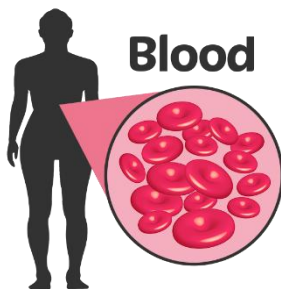


- might have an infection
- and**
- has some of these signs.

What does sepsis do to the body?

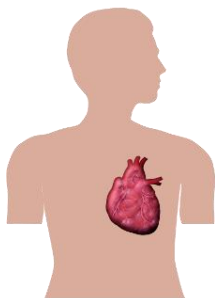


Sepsis can cause a lot of different things to happen to your body.

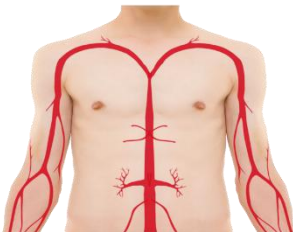


Blood

Your **blood pressure** might drop.



Blood pressure is how hard your blood pushes against the walls of your heart.



This is because the tunnels called blood vessels that let your blood flow around your body get wider.



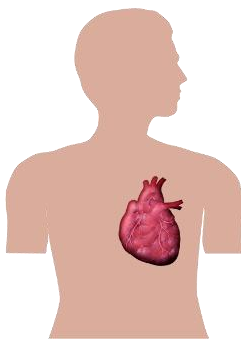
This makes it harder for the heart to pump blood around your body.



Blood pressure is normally found by using a blood pressure device at:

- the doctors
- a pharmacy.

Heart



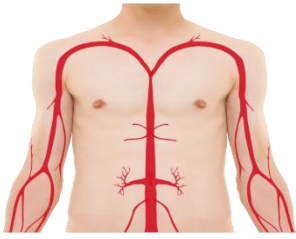
The heart will have to:

- work harder
- beat faster.



When the heart works harder you might feel like you are:

- not breathing enough
- breathing faster.



The heart has to work harder
because of the wider blood vessels.



Skin

The skin can feel:

- hot / flushed
- cool.



The skin can also:

- look pale
- look blotchy / have red patches that do not go away
- have a strange colour
- have a rash.





Head

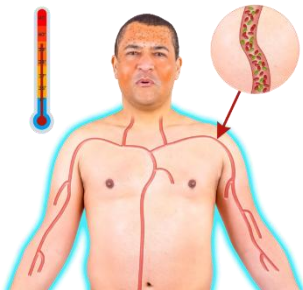
Some people can feel:

- drowsy / sleepy
- confused.

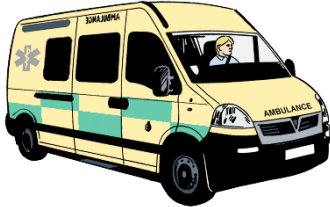


This can be because:

- blood pressure is so low that the brain is not getting enough blood
- the sepsis is causing other bad things to happen.

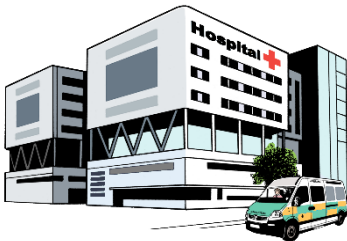


Sepsis is an emergency



Sepsis is a medical emergency because of:

- how fast it can get worse
- what it does to the body
- its chance to kill someone.

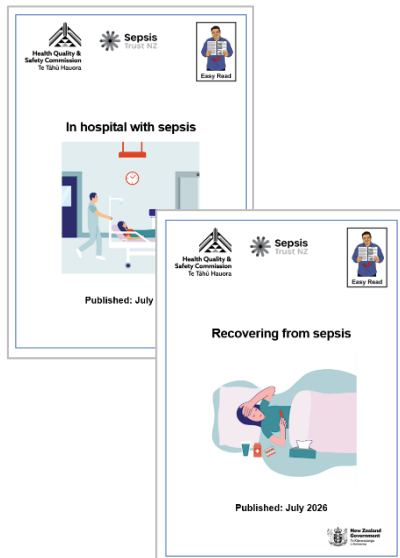


You will need to go to the hospital right away if you have sepsis.



You can phone **111** for emergency services to take you to hospital.

Where to find more Easy Read information about sepsis



There are 2 other Easy Read documents about sepsis called:

- **In hospital with sepsis**
- **Recovering from sepsis.**



You can find these Easy Read at:

<https://hqsc-sepsis-whanau>



This information has been written by Health Quality & Safety Commission Te Tāhū Hauora.



The Health Quality & Safety Commission is part of the New Zealand Government.



It has been translated into Easy Read by the Make it Easy Kia Māmā Mai service of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



The ideas in this document are not the ideas of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



All images used in this Easy Read document are subject to copyright rules and cannot be used without permission.



Make it Easy uses images from:



- Photosymbols
- Change Images
- Huriana Kopeke-Te Aho
- SGC Image Works
- T Wood
- Studio Rebeko
- Inga Kramer.