

UNDERSTANDING Sepsis in Newborns



What is sepsis?

Sepsis is an infection in the blood that can spread to other parts of the body. In newborns, there are two common types of sepsis.

Early onset sepsis

Occurs within 7 days of birth. Risk factors include:

- Premature birth or low birth weight
- Mother's water broke more than 18 hours before birth (premature rupture of the membranes)
- Infection in the mother or in the placenta (**chorioamnionitis**)

Late onset sepsis

Develops when the baby is at least 7 days old, and is usually due to exposure to germs after birth.

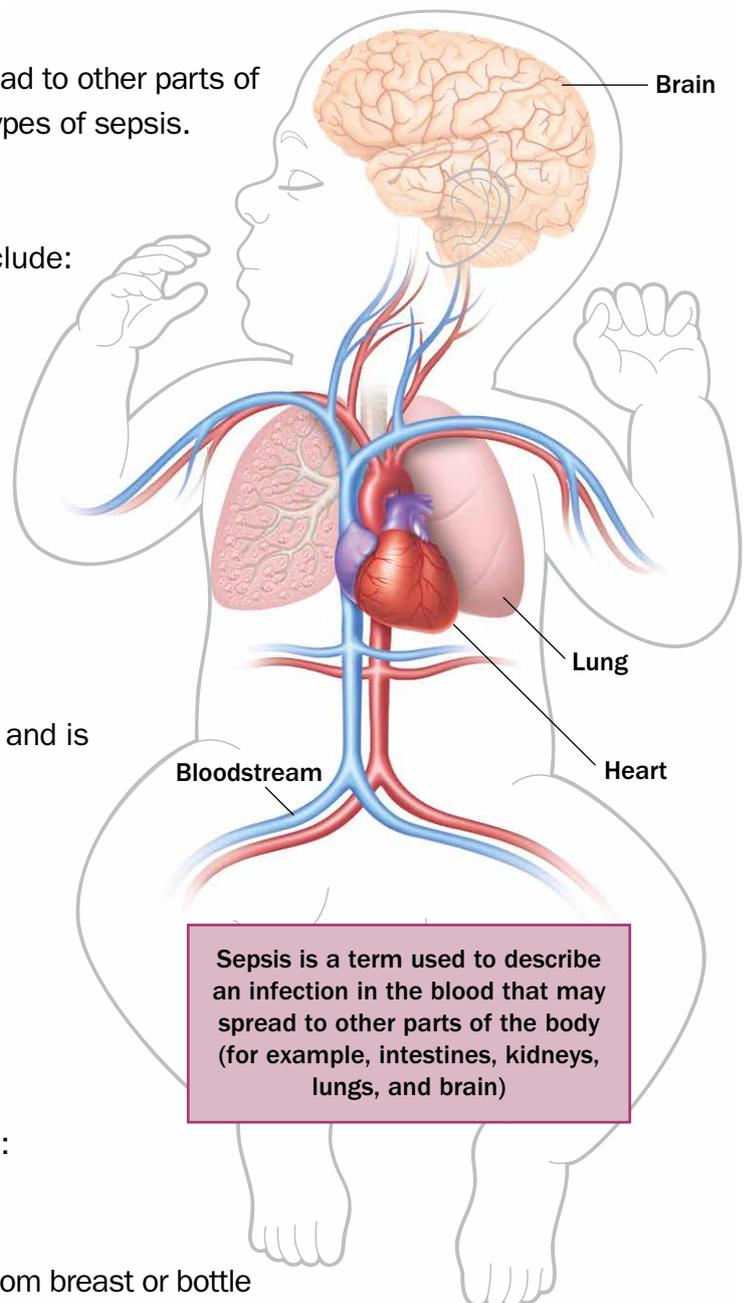
Risk factors include:

- Premature birth or low birth weight
- Baby treated for other health problems in the hospital

What are the symptoms of sepsis?

Symptoms of sepsis in newborns can include:

- Low activity level
- Limited interest in eating or poor feeding from breast or bottle
- Abnormal body temperature (can be too low or too high)
- Pale skin colour
- Vomiting, diarrhea, and/or bloating
- Low blood sugar (**hypoglycemia**)
- Yellow colour of the skin and the whites of the eyes (**jaundice**)
- Trouble breathing, or a brief stop in breathing (**apnea**)
- Decreased heart rate (**bradycardia**)
- Tremors or seizures



Treating Sepsis

Does sepsis cause long-term problems?

When treated, most newborns recover from sepsis. However, some babies develop complications such as **meningitis** (infection of the tissue around the brain and spinal cord) or **pneumonia**. These complications may result in longer hospital stays and a higher risk for long-term problems. The NICU team will watch your baby for signs of these problems. Early treatment of sepsis can help prevent these other infections.

What treatment will my baby receive?

Newborns with sepsis are treated with **antibiotics**.

Sicker babies may also receive:

- Intravenous (IV) fluids
- Extra oxygen – given by nasal cannula (nose tube) or mask:
 - **CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure)** – a treatment that uses mild pressurised air to keep the lungs open
 - **Mechanical ventilator** (in rare cases) – a machine that helps your baby breathe using a tube

How will I know how my baby is doing?

Your health care team will keep you up to date on your baby's progress. They will watch the baby's vital signs (such as heart rate, breathing, and temperature). They may also take blood samples to see if the infection is improving.

What will happen next?

Many babies respond well to treatment for sepsis; however, each baby is different. Talk to your baby's health care team. They can answer any questions you have about your baby.

Glossary

Antibiotics – medicines that fight infections caused by bacteria

Apnea – brief stop in breathing

Bradycardia – decreased heart rate

Chorioamnionitis (kor-e-o-am-nee-o-ni-tis) – infection of the placenta and the fluid surrounding the baby

CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) – a treatment that uses mild, pressurised air to keep the lungs open

Hypoglycemia – low blood sugar

Jaundice – yellow colour of the skin and the whites of the eyes

Mechanical ventilator – a machine that helps your baby breathe by pushing air in and out of the lungs

Meningitis (men-in-jahy-tis) – infection of the tissue around the brain and spinal cord

Pneumonia (noo-mohn-yuh) – infection of the lungs

Sepsis – an infection in the blood that may spread to other parts of the body

Ask the health care team when you have questions— they are there to help.

NOTES:

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