

Every Two Minutes, Someone in the U.S Dies from Sepsis. You Can Help Save a Life by Learning the Signs

September is Sepsis Awareness Month. Here are some facts from Sepsis Alliance, the nation's leading sepsis advocacy organization, about sepsis in the U.S. and how simply knowing the signs can save a life.

You probably have never heard of it. In fact, only 55 percent of adults in the U.S. ever have. It's sneaky and is the result of your body's immune system turning on itself instead of fighting the cause – an infection. It can start from something as simple as a tiny cut. It doesn't discriminate and can happen to anyone – young or old, healthy or ill. Every year, more than 258,000 people in the U.S. die from it, more than from prostate cancer, breast cancer, and AIDS combined. The most devastating part is that it's treatable, especially when it's caught early and treated properly. What is it? Sepsis.

Sepsis is your body's overwhelming and life-threatening response to infection. When your body's immune system is fighting an infection, it can turn on itself and start attacking your organ systems, leading to organ failure, amputation, and death. Symptoms of sepsis include a combination of shivering or fever, extreme pain or discomfort, pale or discolored skin, sleepiness and difficulty to rouse, shortness of breath, and a feeling like you might die. It's important to seek medical attention right away if you have an infection or you suspect an infection, and you are showing a combination of these symptoms. The quicker sepsis is diagnosed and treated, the higher the chance of survival with no or minimal long-term after affects, such as amputations.

September is Sepsis Awareness Month. It's a time when individuals, healthcare professionals, and organizations speak up about sepsis to raise awareness. This could be for your friend who spent several days in the ICU and survived sepsis even after doctors said she might not make it. It could be for a neighbor who lost his family member to sepsis. Maybe it's by a nurse who sees and educates multiple patients a day who show signs of sepsis, or a hospital system that has implemented sepsis protocols to help diagnose and treat sepsis earlier. Sepsis Awareness Month serves to raise awareness about sepsis, including the signs and symptoms, because even just knowing what it is can save someone's life.

Know the signs:

- S – Shivering, fever or very cold
- E – Extreme pain or general discomfort
- P – Pale or discolored skin
- S – Sleepy, difficult to rouse, confused
- I – “I feel like I might die”
- S – Shortness of breath

Mortality from sepsis increases 8% for every hour treatment is delayed. As many as 80% of sepsis deaths could be prevented with rapid diagnosis and treatment.

Sepsis is the body's toxic response to infection. And infection can occur anywhere in the body from a multitude of causes. Some of the more common causes include urinary tract infections, pneumonia, and the flu. Sepsis can also develop from unexpected things like an infection after a tattoo or piercing, or a dental procedure. Seemingly everyday things like cuts and mosquito bites can also cause sepsis if they become infected and aren't treated properly.

So you know what sepsis is and the symptoms, now what?

Prevent infection in the first place by using good hygiene – wash your hands, properly care for open wounds, get vaccinations, and seek medical attention if you suspect sepsis. You can also educate others. Sepsis Alliance has information and resources on its website, Sepsis.org, so you can arm yourself and others with knowledge about sepsis. Join me this month to raise sepsis awareness by knowing what sepsis is and the symptoms. Then tell someone else and ask them to tell another person. The more people we educate about sepsis, the more lives we can save.

Remember, every two minutes someone dies from sepsis – a treatable condition that can start from any kind of infection. So don't hesitate if you suspect sepsis and get medical help as soon as you see the signs. You could save a life.