

Common Risk Factors for Infections

Everyone can get infections. Infections are caused by many kinds of germs. Some people are more likely to get infections than others. They may be more at risk because of health conditions, or where they live or work.

Here are some common risk factors for infections:

Health Status

Health status is a risk factor for infections. Certain chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes, lupus, and HIV can make you less able to fight infections. When your body can't fight infections, you are more likely to get sick.

Certain treatments for these chronic illnesses can also make your body less able to fight infections. For example, chemotherapy for cancer treatment. These drugs weaken your body's immune system, making you more likely to get an infection. This means you are *immunocompromised*.

You are more likely to get infections when you are sick or hurt. Surgeries or skin sores leave openings in the skin that can become infected. Invasive devices like a urinary catheter or IV create a way for germs to enter your body.

Age

Age is also a risk factor for getting an infection. Babies and premature infants are at higher risk for infections. Their bodies are less able to fight infections because their immune systems are not fully developed. Older people are also more at risk for getting infections. As we age, our immune system is less able to fight infections.

The Environment

Where you live or work can put you more at risk for getting an infection. People who live or work in a nursing home can get more infections than people who do not. Many people work in or visit healthcare facilities. These people can come in contact with germs and spread them.

People who live in shared living spaces, like households with large families, are also at a higher risk for infection. When many people live together, an infection can easily spread to others who live there too.

Other Risks

People who do not have enough healthy food to eat may be malnourished. People who are malnourished have weaker immune systems. They are more likely to get an infection.

Smoking also makes people more likely to get a respiratory infection.

Anyone can get an infection, but we can try to lower our chances by being aware of the risk factors.

Know the risks and learn more about infections at [Sepsis.org](https://www.sepsis.org).