

Infection Prevention is Sepsis Prevention in Teens

When teens enter high school, they are often trying to figure things out on their own. This includes issues related to their health and well-being. Because they are in class and participate in activities with many other teens, they can be exposed to illnesses or they can get hurt. Most of the time, these illnesses and injuries aren't serious. But sometimes they can be. For example, if they contract an infection or a wound becomes infected and it's not treated, or treatment is delayed, this can lead to a serious condition called sepsis. Sepsis is a life-threatening emergency that happens when your body's response to an infection damages vital organs and, often, causes death. You may have heard it called "blood poisoning" in the past.

The key in reducing the risk of sepsis is educating our teens so they can learn about preventing infections. They also must understand the importance of identifying infections and treating them as quickly as possible. Although teens can contract many different types of infections, some are more common during the high school years, like the below.

Viral infections such as:

- Influenza (the flu)
- Mononucleosis ("mono")
- Meningitis
- Viral sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including herpes and human papillomavirus (HPV)

Bacterial infections such as:

- Strep throat
- MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus)
- Urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Bacterial STIs, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis

Fungal Infections

Many fungal infections caught at school, like athlete's foot or ringworm, are typically less serious. However, teens who have a weakened immune system or a chronic health problem could get very sick from other fungal infections, such as Valley Fever. This infection is caused by a fungus (coccidioides) that grows in the soil in hot, dry climates, like in Arizona, California, and Texas.

Sepsis

Like strokes or heart attacks, sepsis is a life-threatening medical emergency that requires rapid diagnosis and treatment. It can affect anyone at any time. More than 18 children and teens in the U.S. die from sepsis each day. Many who survive sepsis are left with long-term problems. But sepsis can often be prevented by reducing the risk of infections and treating infections seriously.

Vaccines:

Regular vaccines help prevent many illnesses, including the flu, polio, and tetanus. Cases of meningitis – a very serious infection – dropped drastically where the vaccine is now routine. If your teen cannot receive vaccines because of an underlying problem, it's important that the people around them be vaccinated, providing "herd immunity."

Wound care:

Cleaning all cuts and scrapes with soap and water can help remove bacteria. Antibacterial ointment may also be helpful. Try to keep the wound covered and dry while it's healing.

Hand washing:

Remind your teen about the importance of hand hygiene, and washing their hands properly and often so they can protect themselves.

Your school nurse is probably the most accessible front-line healthcare professional your teen has access to during their high school years. A school nurse's role is vital to helping keep your teen as healthy as possible and managing health issues, should any come up. Remind your teen that they can see their school nurse if they aren't feeling well or have any health-related questions.

If your teen is sick, watch for signs of sepsis.

T

Temperature:

Higher or lower than normal

I

Infection: May have signs and symptoms of an infection

M

Mental Decline: Confused, sleepy, difficult to rouse

E

Extremely Ill: Severe pain, discomfort, shortness of breath

If you suspect sepsis, call 9-1-1 or go to a hospital and tell your medical professional, "I AM CONCERNED ABOUT SEPSIS."

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