

# SPOTTING SEPSIS IN CHILDREN



THE UK  
SEPSIS  
TRUST



## WHAT IS SEPSIS?

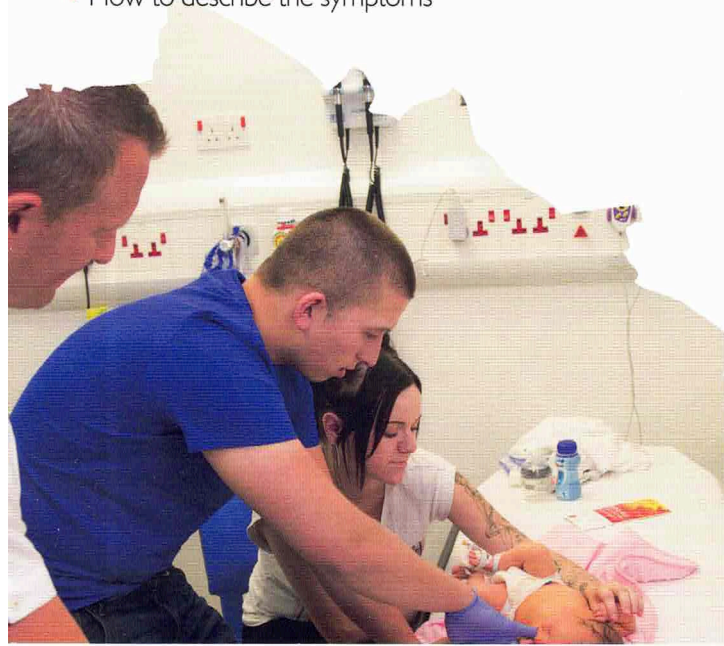
Sepsis could affect any one of us. It's an emergency condition that affects 245,000 people in the UK each year, claiming 48,000 lives – that's 120 every day! Sepsis is what happens when our immune system overreacts to an infection. We can't stop people developing the condition, and it's usually treatable if caught quickly. But without swift medical attention it can lead to multiple organ failure and death, so it's really important to know what to look out for.

Whilst the majority survive, 25,000 children are admitted to hospital with sepsis every year in the UK.

**Please use this leaflet if you're concerned about your child's symptoms, especially if their illness seems unlike anything they've had before, and they're 'just not right' – even if their temperature falls again.**

This information will help you monitor your child's condition so you know:

- When to ask for help
- Where to go
- How to describe the symptoms



# AMBER SYMPTOMS

Some (but not all) children with these symptoms are seriously unwell.

Ask for an assessment **TODAY** from a trained health professional, and Just Ask: "Could it be Sepsis?"

## TEMPERATURE

- Raised temperature (more than 37.5°C) for five days or more
- Shivering or shaking

## BREATHING

- Nostrils change size with each breath
- Breathing that's noisy or sounds 'crackly'
- Cough that sounds like a seal barking

## SKIN, LIPS & TONGUE

- Unusually pale skin
- Dry mouth, lips and/or tongue

## EATING & DRINKING

- Baby who is not feeding (taking less than half their usual amount of milk)
- Eating much less than normal
- Has vomited (been sick) more than twice in the last 24 hours

## TOILET/NAPPIES

- More than five watery poos (diarrhoea) in the last 24 hours in babies younger than one year of age
- Only one wee or wet nappy in eight hours

## ACTIVITY & BODY

- Less interested than usual in playing
- Difficult to wake up or unusually sleepy
- Swelling of a limb or joint
- Not using/putting weight on an arm, leg, hand or foot

**It's sometimes hard to be sure about particular signs and symptoms. If you feel that your child may be seriously ill, or if something that concerns you is not on these lists, call NHS 111, contact your GP, or go to your local Walk-in Centre or Minor Injury Unit depending on your level of concern.**

# RED SYMPTOMS

Many (but not all) children with these symptoms are seriously unwell.

**TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION.  
DIAL 999 STRAIGHT AWAY. DON'T DELAY.**

- Temperature over 38°C in babies under three months
- Temperature over 39°C in babies aged three to six months
- Any high temperature in a child who cannot be encouraged to show interest in anything
- Low temperature (below 36°C, check three times in a 10 minute period)

## BREATHING

- Finding it much harder to breathe than normal – looks like hard work
- Making 'grunting' noises with every breath (in newborns this may sound like a lamb bleating)
- Very fast breathing (more than one breath each second in babies)
- Can't say more than a few words at once (for older children who normally talk)
- Breathing that obviously 'pauses'

## SKIN LIPS & TONGUE

- Skin is blue, mottled (purplish, red) or very pale
- Lips or tongue are bluish
- Eyes look 'sunken'
- Hands and feet are unusually cold to touch
- Rash that does not fade when pressed firmly (use a clear glass)

## EATING & DRINKING

- New baby under one month old with no interest in feeding
- Not drinking for more than eight hours (when awake)
- Extremely thirsty
- Unable to keep fluids down
- Persistently vomiting for more than 24 hours
- Bile-stained (green), bloody or black vomit/sick

## TOILET/NAPPIES

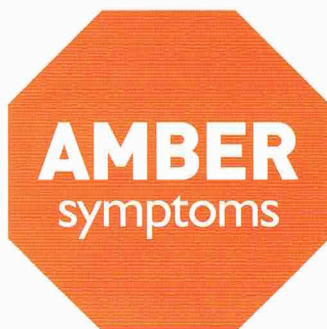
- Not had a wee or wet nappy for 12 hours

## ACTIVITY & BODY

- Soft spot on a baby's head is bulging
- Child cannot be encouraged to show interest in anything
- Baby is floppy
- Weak, 'whining' or continuous crying in a younger child
- Older child who's confused
- Not responding or very irritable
- Hard to wake up, won't stay awake or doesn't seem to recognise you
- Stiff neck, especially when trying to look up and down



If your child has:



SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE AND  
**JUST ASK**  
"COULD IT BE SEPSIS?"



**GET YOUR CHILD TO  
HOSPITAL QUICKLY**

Dial **999** for an  
ambulance if necessary

If you've been affected by sepsis, visit [sepsistrust.org/get-support](https://sepsistrust.org/get-support), or call **0808 800 0029** to speak to our specialist support team with many years' experience. They're passionate and dedicated to help those struggling with grief, having problems with recovery or trying to support a loved one.

## “WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE KNOW ABOUT THIS?”

“People often ask me if I'm angry about what happened to Sam. Mostly I feel bereft. What does make me angry is when I hear of the same mistakes that contributed to Sam's avoidable death happening again and again; more children who die because of delays in diagnosis and treatment; more parents who never had the opportunity to ask “could it be sepsis?” because no one told them it existed.”

### **Sue Morrish** (Sam's Mum)

This information is derived, with permission, from the SAM leaflet produced by NHS England (South West) to improve recognition of sepsis in children. Contributors include paediatricians, sepsis experts, nurses, GPs and parents of children who've had sepsis.



# JUST ASK

## “COULD IT BE SEPSIS?”

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