

Sepsis

the question worth asking out loud

Sepsis is the body's immune response to infection turning against its own organs. It can follow any infection — a chest infection, a urine infection, a cut, a bite. It kills tens of thousands of people in the UK each year, and survival depends almost entirely on how quickly it is recognised and treated.

Call 999 or go to an emergency department if an adult has

- **slurred speech or confusion**
- **extreme shivering or muscle pain**
- **passing no urine** in a day
- **severe breathlessness**
- a feeling that they are **going to die**
- **skin that is mottled, discoloured, blue, pale or very grey**

Those six form the widely used memory aid: **Slurred speech, Extreme shivering, Passing no urine, Severe breathlessness, It feels like you're going to die, Skin mottled or discoloured**. A rash that does not fade under a glass is also an emergency. Do not wait for a GP appointment. In an emergency call 999, or go to the Royal London Hospital Emergency Department, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR.

In a child

- breathing very fast, or grunting; pauses in breathing
- a **rash that does not fade** when a glass is pressed on it
- a **fit or convulsion**
- mottled, bluish or very pale skin
- **abnormally cold to touch**, or very lethargic and difficult to wake
- in a baby: not feeding, repeated vomiting, or no wet nappy for 12 hours

Ask the question: 'Could this be sepsis?'

Sepsis is missed because early on it looks like flu, a chest infection or a stomach bug — and because people worry about making a fuss. Saying the word out loud changes the conversation and is encouraged by the UK Sepsis Trust. If you or someone you are with is deteriorating and something feels badly wrong, say: **'I'm worried this might be sepsis.'** No clinician will think less of you for asking, and it prompts a specific set of checks.

Who is at higher risk

- babies under one, and adults over 75
- anyone with a **weakened immune system** — chemotherapy, steroids, immunosuppressants, no spleen
- diabetes
- recent surgery, a wound, a catheter, a drip line or a recent invasive procedure
- pregnancy, or having given birth or miscarried in the past six weeks
- people who inject drugs

Reducing the risk

- **Treat infections properly** — finish antibiotic courses, and get wounds reviewed if they are not settling.
- **Keep vaccinations current**, particularly flu, COVID and pneumococcal if you are eligible.
- **Clean and cover wounds**, and take bites and burns seriously.
- **If you are immunosuppressed**, know your own escalation plan and use it early rather than late.
- Trust deterioration: an infection that is getting worse rather than better after a few days needs reassessing, not waiting out.

Recovery afterwards

Post-sepsis syndrome is common and under-recognised — profound fatigue, muscle weakness, poor concentration, low mood and anxiety lasting months. It is a recognised consequence rather than a failure to bounce back, and it deserves review, rehabilitation and support.

We are not where you go during sepsis — call 999. But we are the right place to have an infection reassessed when it is not settling, to be reviewed at 48 hours as arranged, to get vaccinations if you are at higher risk, and for follow-up and blood tests after a hospital admission. We are open seven days a week, 9am–7pm, with same-day appointments most days, blood testing in-house and results explained by a clinician.

Infection not settling? Get it reassessed today

Same-day appointments seven days a week. In an emergency call 999.

Book an appointment

or call 020 7916 0029

Where to get help

Tower Bridge Hospital London

97–99 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DT

020 7916 0029

WhatsApp **07903 284 189**

info@mhwclinic.co.uk

Open 7 days, 9am–7pm

In an emergency

Call 999, or go to the Royal London Hospital Emergency Department, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR.

When we are closed and it is not an emergency

Call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk.

Related: [Urgent Care](#) · [Blood Tests](#) · [Travel Vaccinations](#) · [All patient leaflets](#)

Written and reviewed by Dr H Bolat, GP & Clinical Director Review date: 26 July 2026 Next review due: July 2028

Ref: TBH-PIL-121

This leaflet is based on current NHS, NICE NG51 and UK Sepsis Trust guidance on the recognition and management of sepsis. It is general information and does not replace advice from a clinician who has assessed you. If your symptoms change or you are worried, contact us on 020 7916 0029, call NHS 111, or call 999 in an emergency.

© 2026 My Health & Wellbeing Clinics Ltd, trading as Tower Bridge Hospital London. Company No. 14811638 · CQC Provider ID 1-17189808454 · Registered office: 97–99 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DT.