Let's Talk About ...

Sepsis in newborns

Sepsis is an infection that affects the entire body. It can be caused by either a bacteria or a virus. When sepsis is caused by bacteria, it may have begun growing in the bloodstream, urine, or the fluid around the spinal cord. While viral infections are usually less dangerous, they can also make babies sick. Healthcare providers usually need tests to tell what is causing the infection.

Fortunately, if sepsis is recognized and treated early, most babies will make a full recovery.

Which babies are at risk for sepsis?

Noticing sepsis early isn't always easy. Many babies won't have signs of infection until later. Your baby has a higher risk of getting sepsis if:

- They were born prematurely
- Your water broke (membranes ruptured) early
- You had an infection of the fluid and membranes (chorioamnionitis) while caring the baby
- You tested positive for group B strep (GBS) bacteria or received antibiotics for GBS

What are the signs of sepsis?

The signs of sepsis may include:

- Fast or noisy breathing
- Fever
- Low temperature
- Not eating well
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Being sleepy and hard to wake up
- Being fussy and hard to calm down
- Jaundice
- Change in skin color (pale, patchy, or blue)

Your baby's healthcare provider may be worried about sepsis for other reasons. If you have questions, ask your baby's healthcare provider.



What happens if my baby is at risk for sepsis?

If your baby has a higher risk for sepsis, they will receive special care in the hospital. This may include:

- **Extra monitoring.** The nursing staff will check on your baby often. They will watch your baby's temperature, pulse, and blood pressure.
- Blood testing. Your baby may need to have blood drawn for tests.
- **Urine testing.** The healthcare provider may check your baby's urine for infection.
- **IV line.** Your baby may receive fluid or medicine through an IV (a small tube placed into a vein).
- **Antibiotics.** Your baby may need medicine to fight bacteria that can cause sepsis.
- **Lumbar puncture.** Your baby's healthcare provider will quickly insert a small tube into your baby's lower back to test the fluid around the spinal cord for infection.

• **Chest x-ray.** If your baby has breathing problems, an x-ray may help the care team understand the cause.

Not all babies at risk for sepsis will receive all of the care described above. However, most babies at risk for sepsis need to stay in the hospital for at least 36–48 hours.

What can I do if my baby stays in the hospital?

If your baby needs extra care in the hospital, try to stay positive and remember:

- Your baby may not have sepsis. Most babies who are tested do not end up having a serious infection.
- If your baby does have sepsis, there's a good chance for a full recovery. Early detection and treatment can lower the chance of serious health problems.
- Your baby's doctors and nurses want to keep you informed and involved. Ask them questions at any time.

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