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Finding and treating sepsis at St. Jude

Sepsis is a dangerous condition that can happen when your child has an infection. The body's infection-fighting system is called the immune system. It usually fights off infections, sometimes with help from medicines. If your child gets sepsis, the immune system attacks your child's own body instead of the infection. This attack releases toxins that can change body temperature, heart rate and blood pressure. These toxins can also prevent the body's organs from working properly.

The St. Jude staff has been involved in a nationwide effort to define and measure sepsis and improve outcomes. The Children's Hospital Association organized this effort. The hospitals involved developed patient care guidelines for finding and treating sepsis early.

Why are St. Jude patients at risk for sepsis?

Sepsis is more common in patients who:

- Are in the hospital,
- Had surgery recently,
- Have certain medical equipment, such as an IV or catheter, or
- Have a weaker immune system

than normal. For example, some patients getting chemotherapy will have weak immune systems.

The St. Jude team will check your child for signs of sepsis. They also will do things to help prevent it, such as keeping your child's room, IV, and other medical equipment clean. You can also help protect your child. Learn the signs of sepsis and ask your child's doctor or nurse if you have questions or notice anything that worries you.

What are the signs of sepsis?

Talk to a St. Jude doctor or nurse right away if your child shows any of these signs:

- Acting irritable, fussy, confused or just "different"
- Being more sleepy than usual
- Having a fever (100.4 degrees F or above)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea,
- Breathing problems

A child with sepsis can also have low blood pressure and a fast heart rate.

If you talked to the doctor or nurse and are still concerned that your child may be getting worse and needs to

be seen right way, call the Rapid Response Team (RRT). See the RRT article on this page.

What happens if the staff suspects your child may have sepsis?

The medical team, nursing coordinator and your child's bedside nurse will discuss your child's vital signs and any signs of sepsis your child might have. You will be included in this discussion. You can give the staff important information about your child's current state.

The staff will carefully consider the risk of sepsis based on your child's diagnosis and current ability to fight infection. The team may decide that even though your child has some possible sepsis signs, they do not suspect it at this time. Your child may be placed on a "sepsis watch." The staff will watch your child closely for signs of sepsis and will likely do tests and give your child antibiotics.

If sepsis is suspected, your child might be transferred to the intensive care unit or might remain on the current unit and watched closely.

How is sepsis treated?

First, your child will have tests to look for sepsis. These can include:

- Tests on blood, urine, spinal fluid, or a sample of your child's bowel movements, and
- A chest X-ray.

Sepsis treatment depends on the cause. Bacteria are the most common cause. Antibiotics treat infections from bacteria, so your child will get antibiotics until the doctor has the test results. If the results show that bacteria are the cause of sepsis, the doctor will tell you how long your child needs antibiotics. Other treatments include medicine to treat pain and fever, and fluids to keep your child from getting dehydrated.

A virus, fungus or parasite can also cause sepsis. Your child's doctor will tell you about treatment if one of these is the cause.

If you have questions about sepsis, please ask your child's doctor or nurse.

Rapid Response Team is on call

The St. Jude Rapid Response Team (RRT) will come quickly if there is an urgent need for medical help at the hospital. If you are concerned, we are concerned. Please tell the staff if you think your child needs urgent care.

When to call the Rapid Response Team

Call the RRT if you have talked to a St. Jude nurse or doctor, and you are still concerned that your child may be getting worse and needs to be seen right away. Some reasons to be concerned include: a change in skin color, trouble breathing, a sudden change in behavior, or if you just have a feeling that something is not right.

How to call the Rapid Response Team

From any hospital phone, dial 3999, and tell the operator to call the Rapid Response Team. You can also dial 901-595-3999 from a cell phone. Tell the operator your child's name and room number or give your current location.

When not to call the Rapid Response Team

If your child has a medical emergency away from the St. Jude hospital buildings, call 911. If you have other concerns that are not about your child's current medical state, talk to a St. Jude nurse or the nursing coordinator. If your concern is not resolved or you need more help, please call the St. Jude HelpLine. Dial 2999 from any hospital phone or 901-595-2999 you are outside the hospital or calling from a cell phone.



Talking about Medicines

Traveling safely with medicines

By Shane Cross, PharmD, Pharmaceutical Service

At St. Jude, we see many patients from all over the country and around the world. As a result, some of our families will travel back and forth many times during the course of their children's treatment. Here are a few tips for traveling safely with medicines:

- If traveling by car, do not store medicines in the glove compartment or the trunk of your car. Medicines are sensitive to temperature extremes, and these areas can become very hot and humid.
- Keep medicines with you in a carry-on bag when traveling by train, plane or bus. Your child may need a dose during travel. Plus, if your luggage gets lost, you could be without it for several days.
- If traveling by plane, alert airport security if you have liquid medicines with you. Inform security before the screening process begins. Liquid medicines will need to be screened separately from other carry-on items.
- Also tell airport security about other medicine supplies you may have, such as syringes, ice packs, IV bags and pumps.
- It is recommended that you keep a complete list of your child's medicines. Include names, doses and schedules of each and always keep the medicines stored in their original containers.
- Take plenty of your child's medicines home with you in case you stay away from St. Jude longer than expected.

Of course, all of the above applies to your medicines as well. If you have more questions about traveling with medicines, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Did you receive a Patient Satisfaction Survey?

Please help improve care for all St. Jude patients by sharing your opinions.

Email for lodging, call for travel

Did you know you can email Patient Services to reserve your lodging? If you have a lodging request that's more than seven days away, email your request to reservationrequest@stjude.org. A patient services representative will respond to your request within 24 hours or the next business day.

If you have a request for local transportation, remember that your request must be made 24 hours before the pick-up time.

Call 901-595-4501 for all requests for local transportation.

If you need to schedule travel by air or train, call the St. Jude Travel Office at 901-595-5000 and choose option 1.



St. Jude Parents is published on the first of each month by Patient Education and Information and Biomedical Communications. Your questions and comments are important to us. **We want to print advice and tips from St. Jude parents to other St. Jude parents.** To share your ideas or to receive this newsletter by email, please call or email Alicia Wright, RN, MSN, at 901-595-5453 (ParentsNewsletter@stjude.org) or Lois Young (loislane.young@comcast.net). To subscribe to an online version of this newsletter or to learn more about *St. Jude Parents*, visit www.stjude.org/parents-newsletter. St. Jude is an Equal Opportunity Employer. St. Jude complies with health care-related federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. ATTENTION: If you speak another language, assistance services, free of charge, are available to you. Call 1-866-278-5833 (TTY: 1-901-595-1040). ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-866-278-5833 (TTY: 1-901-595-1040).

تنبيه: إذا كنت تتحدث باللغة العربية فيمكنك الاستفادة بخدمات المساعدة اللغوية المتوفرة لك مجاناً. يرجى الاتصال بالرقم 1-866-278-5833 (الهاتف النصي: 1-901-595-1040).


St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

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