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Do you know the signs of Sepsis?

World Sepsis Day is held on 13 September each year and is an opportunity to raise awareness in the fight against sepsis. Sepsis accounts for about eight million deaths world-wide each year, yet many people are unaware of this deadly illness.

Sepsis occurs when the body is overwhelmed by infection, which can even start from something as simple as a cut or a bite. The treatment of sepsis is time-critical; when treated in its early stages, sepsis responds well to treatment, however, there is often a significant delay to diagnosis and treatment.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) Paediatric Emergency Physician, Dr Scott Schofield, says more awareness around this preventable illness will lead to more accurate and timely diagnosis and therefore appropriate and time critical treatment, which will provide better outcomes for patients.

“The lack of awareness surrounding sepsis makes it the number one preventable cause of death worldwide. Many surviving patients suffer from the consequences for the rest of their lives.

“Sepsis can be tricky to diagnose, as it often presents similarly to common, less severe infections such as those of the respiratory system, gastrointestinal or urinary tract, or of wounds and skin. Without high level of suspicion, sepsis is frequently under-diagnosed at an early stage - when still potentially reversible.” Dr Schofield said.

Most types of microorganisms can cause sepsis, including bacteria, fungi, viruses, and parasites. It can also be caused by infections with the seasonal influenza viruses, tropical and travel related infections, and other highly transmissible viruses.

“Many people are also unaware that some types of sepsis can be prevented by vaccination and clean care and that early recognition and treatment reduces sepsis mortality roughly by 50 per cent,” Dr Schofield said.

“World Sepsis Day is a great opportunity to improve education on the regional, national and international level, and to raise public awareness related to the signs of sepsis.

“In the SCHHS we have a great team of passionate health professionals from a wide cross section of specialist and fields including Emergency Medicine, Intensive Care,
Infectious Diseases, Paediatrics and Pharmacy working together to improve the care of patients with sepsis. We are participating in a large, state-wide collaborative to improve the quality and consistency of care for patients with this common, deadly disease by improving the diagnosis and treatment in our local facilities.

**Signs of Sepsis**

Sepsis can be difficult to recognise as it can have symptoms similar to other illnesses. It may look different in children than it does in adults. Some of the early symptoms may include a combination of the following:

**In children less than 5 years old:**

- Poor feeding
- Vomiting repeatedly or
- Not passed urine for 12 hours.

**For older children:**

- Rapid breathing
- Convulsing or having a fit
- Mottled, blueish or pale complexion
- Rash that does not fade when pressed
- Lethargy or difficulty in waking
- Feeling abnormally cold to touch.

**Among adults:**

S – Slurred speech or confusion  
E – Extreme shivering or muscle pain  
P – Passing no urine in a day  
S – Severe breathlessness  
I – “I feel like I might die”  
S – Skin mottled or discoloured

Some information has been adapted from materials created by the UK Sepsis Trust. Further information is available at sepsistrust.org

ENDS

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