



## Septicemia

### MU Patient Education Series

#### **Definition:**

Septicemia is a serious condition caused by toxic, exceptionally harmful or poisonous bacteria in the blood. In most cases, septicemia arises from infections elsewhere in the body (such as the lungs, urinary tract, bone, central nervous system, heart, skin or abdomen) that lead to a hazardous buildup of bacteria in the bloodstream. Septicemia worsens very quickly and may become life-threatening and must be immediately treated and monitored.

#### **CAUSES:**

Septicemia arises in the blood as a result of infections found in other body parts. Infections in the lungs, abdomen, bone, urinary tract, central nervous system, heart and skin can lead to septicemia. These infections spread dangerous bacteria into the bloodstream.

#### **WHO IS AT HIGH RISK FOR SEPTICEMIA?**

Exposure to germs and bacteria increase your risk of acquiring septicemia; however, certain situations pose extreme risks for septicemia:

- Close contact with a septicemia patient
- Weak immune system
- Young age
- Old age
- Infections of a specific organ or tissue region



### SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

Septicemia is a serious condition with serious and severe symptoms. As time goes on, the symptoms quickly worsen. The initial symptoms of septicemia consist of:

- Sudden high fever
- Chills
- Quick breathing
- Quick heart rate

As the infection progresses, the patient will begin to look extremely ill and will experience symptoms with greater severity, such as:

- Confusion
- Change in mental status
- Red spots covering the skin
- Shock
- Rapid heart rate
- Brief loss of consciousness
- Urination will decrease or cease

If the infection turns life-threatening, you may **see the following symptoms that call for immediate emergency care:**

- Complete change in mental status
- Fever and chills
- Confusion or loss of consciousness
- Rapid breathing and/or heart rate
- Sudden surge in temperature
- If the person looks very ill

### DIAGNOSIS/TESTS:

After experiencing any number of the aforementioned signs or symptoms, it is essential that you or someone around you contact your healthcare provider immediately. Upon meeting with your physician, he or she will ask about your medical history and conduct a physical examination. Your physical examination will likely show low blood pressure, low body temperature or a fever.



After showing these signs during the physical examination, you will receive one or more of the following tests:

- Blood culture to test your blood for infection
- Blood gases test to measure the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your blood to show the efficiency of your lungs
- CBC test to measure the amount of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets in your blood
- Checking for blood clots
- Urinalysis and urine culture
- Examining any sores that may be present on your skin
- Examining your cerebrospinal fluid to look for bacteria

### TREATMENT/CARE:

Due to its severity, septicemia requires hospitalization. You may even be admitted into the intensive care unit (ICU). Once in the hospital you will likely receive:

- Antibiotics to attack your infection
- Fluids and medication through an IV
- Oxygen to relieve some of the workload from your lungs
- Plasma or other blood products to reduce blood clotting

**If diagnosed with septicemia, you must follow your treatment plan exactly.** If not treated properly, this condition can be extremely harmful, even deadly. If you follow your doctor's plan, you will be on the right track to becoming healthy again.

### POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS:

As mentioned before, it is critical that you follow your specific septicemia treatment plan. If you follow your plan exactly, you will greatly lower your risk for potential complications. If the treatment plan is not followed or another complication occurs, serious obstacles may arise, such as:

- Adult respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS)
- Dangerously low blood pressure (septic shock)
- Death
- Kidney failure
- Reduced circulation
- Respiratory failure requiring mechanical assistance to help you breathe
- Stroke



### PREVENTION:

Given that septicemia is spread through the body by means of infection, it is important to take precautionary measures to avoid such an infection. If you do acquire an infection, it is vastly important that you treat it properly. Doing so will greatly reduce the risk of your infection spreading and causing septicemia. In some cases, a person who is in close contact with a septicemia patient may be prescribed preventive antibiotics. Regular immunizations are highly important. If you are appropriately immunized and vaccinated, you will be on the right track to preventing septicemia.

### CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF...

If you are experiencing any septicemia symptoms, it is imperative to call your doctor immediately. This is a serious and extremely harmful condition that if not treated quickly or correctly can be lethal. Be sure to call your healthcare provider immediately if you or someone around you begins to have a quickened pulse, chills, fever, change in mental status, shock or change in blood pressure or body temperature.

### **DISCLAIMER:**

***Medline does not practice medicine, and no information presented on this website is medical advice or intended as a substitute for the advice of a physician.***