

Mayo Clinic: Sepsis—a team response to a potential killer

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Our bodies are very good at fighting infection. The immune system reacts and attacks bacteria and viruses that make us sick. But sometimes the immune reaction is so strong that it damages the body. This is called a septic reaction or sepsis, and the mortality rate associated with it can be high.

In fact, a new study suggests that [sepsis](#) is responsible for 20% of all deaths worldwide. That's more deaths than are attributed to cancer. At Mayo Clinic, doctors like Kannan Ramar, M.B.B.S., M.D., are trying to change that with a sepsis response team in intensive care units. Their goal: to stop sepsis and save lives.

"Sepsis is a potentially life-threatening complication related to an infection." Ramar says every year, close to three-quarters of a million people in the U.S. develop a septic reaction. It happens when an infection prompts the [immune system](#) to kick into overdrive, causing problems such as kidney failure, liver failure, severe drops in blood pressure and even death. "It becomes very important that this is recognized early." That's because the death rate can be very high. Up to

75% for people who develop sepsis at home and up to 25% for those who get it in the hospital.

"It's similar to treating a [heart attack](#) or a stroke, where you have a very short window within which you take the necessary steps to prevent significant damage from happening down the road. It's a big multidisciplinary approach to do this, and so all members of the ICU team are actively involved to get this aggressive resuscitation going and to get all the things done. We follow what we call the Surviving Sepsis Resuscitation Guidelines."

Methods of best practice developed by the Society of Critical Care Medicine to ensure the best possible treatment for patients. "If the necessary things are done, then the mortality drops down dramatically." By following the best practice guidelines, Ramar says the sepsis response team has made Mayo Clinic's Medical ICU a leader in successful sepsis treatment.

Who's at risk for developing sepsis? Ramar says it can happen to anybody, but people whose immune systems are compromised and those with diseases such as diabetes are at increased risk. He also says, signs of infection you should take seriously include persistent fever, nausea, vomiting, chills, confusion and worsening condition. If you experience these things, see your [health care provider](#) or seek emergency medical care.

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