



## BRIEFINGS FOR CARERS

# INFECTION (including SEPSIS)

## What is it?

Infections are caused by germs (such as harmful bacteria or viruses) invading a person's body and multiplying. Our bodies usually fight infections with our immune system, which causes inflammation. It is the inflammation that makes us feel ill when we have an infection, e.g. a swelling at the site of the infection or having a high temperature or skin rash.

Sepsis is a rare but serious reaction to an infection. Sepsis is when our immune system response becomes overactive and starts to cause damage to the body itself. It can be hard to tell if you have sepsis. You might not have a fever or high temperature, you may just feel very unwell. Sepsis needs to be treated urgently because it can quickly get worse and lead to severe sepsis or septic shock. Septic shock is very serious, as it can cause organ failure and death.

## Who is most at risk?

- Very young children and older people.
- People with weak immune systems or who are having chemotherapy.
- People with Down's syndrome.
- People who are prone to infections.
- People who have catheters (e.g. a urinary catheter), breathing tubes (e.g. tracheostomy) or feeding tubes (e.g. PEG).
- People with wounds (e.g. following injury or surgery) or sores (e.g. pressure sores).
- People with existing health conditions such as diabetes.
- People already in hospital because of another serious illness.

## Reducing the risk:

**Vaccinate:** vaccinate people against common infectious diseases, including flu.

**Wash:** wash your hands frequently, and after toileting, coughing, sneezing or using tissues. Encourage others to do so too.

**Isolate:** keep anyone with signs of infection away from others (so they do not spread the infection to other people).

**Treat quickly:** take anyone with signs of infection for medical attention.

## Signs of infection

Generally feeling unwell

Unusually high or low temperature

New/increased/continual pain

Change in body functions e.g. new cough, vomiting etc

## Early signs of sepsis

Unusually high or low temperature

Chills and shivering or centrally hot with cold hands and feet

Fast heartbeat and/or breathing

Rash

Change in behaviour e.g. restless or lethargic

## Signs of severe sepsis

Change in skin colour

Confusion, dizziness, slurred speech or collapse

Not passing urine

Severe muscle pain

Severe breathlessness

Diarrhoea and vomiting

**If someone shows signs of infection, call GP or out of hours service**

**If someone shows early signs of sepsis, get urgent advice from NHS 111**

**If someone shows signs of severe sepsis call 999**

**Always explain that you think the person may have sepsis**

