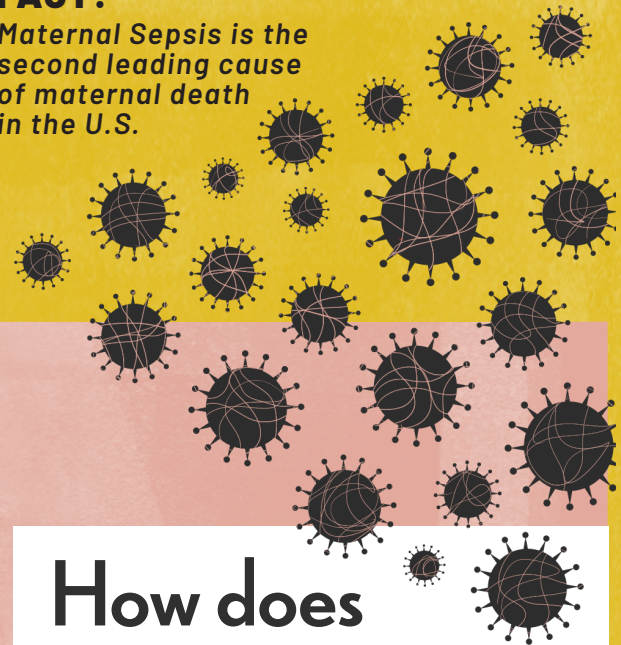


What is Maternal Sepsis?



FACT:

Maternal Sepsis is the second leading cause of maternal death in the U.S.



Sepsis is a life-threatening condition caused by an infection. The body attacks its own organs and tissues, leading to tissue damage, organ failure, and sometimes death. Sepsis that occurs during pregnancy, childbirth, after an abortion, or in the days and weeks following childbirth is called maternal sepsis.

Sepsis is a leading cause of death for pregnant women and new moms in the United States. Women who survive maternal sepsis often experience serious physical, mental, and emotional trauma.

How does Maternal Sepsis Develop?

Maternal sepsis usually occurs when a C-section incision, tear or other wound from childbirth becomes infected in the days or weeks after giving birth. However, any kind of infection during pregnancy or after childbirth such as pneumonia, strep throat, and urinary tract infections can lead to sepsis.

The risk of infection and sepsis increases as a result of:

- Diabetes and other chronic illnesses
- C-section delivery
- Mastitis (breast infection)
- Being pregnant with twins or other multiples
- Invasive procedures before and during pregnancy, including:
 - IVF
 - Amniocentesis

Even minor interventions and complications during childbirth can lead to infections, including:

- Having a long labor or if your water breaks more than 18 hours before delivery
- Having multiple vaginal examinations during labor
- Using forceps or a vacuum during delivery

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Maternal Sepsis?

Signs and symptoms can vary. Contact a healthcare provider immediately if you have any of the following:

- Fever and chills and generally feeling unwell
- Dizziness and confusion
- Back or abdominal pain
- Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Feeling like your heart is racing
- Chesty cough
- Pain/burning on passing urine or not passing urine in a day



Who is most at risk?

Any woman who is pregnant, has miscarried or aborted, or has delivered a baby can develop maternal sepsis.

Some women are more likely to develop maternal sepsis. These include:

- Women younger than 20 years old at the time of birth
- Hispanic, Black and Asian women
- Women who deliver via C-section

How is Sepsis Diagnosed?

Doctors will order multiple examinations, including blood tests, to identify an infection.

How is Maternal Sepsis Treated?

Maternal sepsis needs to be treated early and aggressively. It often requires hospital admission for intravenous antibiotic treatment.

Can Maternal Sepsis be prevented?

Yes. Maternal sepsis is preventable and treatable.

It is important to speak up to a healthcare provider if you feel unwell so that you can be treated as quickly as possible. Speaking up can be hard, but if something doesn't feel right, tell your healthcare provider. Make sure your questions are answered and don't let anyone dismiss your concerns.

During pregnancy:

- Contact your healthcare provider if you think you have an infection of any kind
- Be up to date on routine vaccinations, especially flu vaccinations
- If a C-section is recommended, ask your healthcare provider how to avoid infection following a C-section

After childbirth:

- Wash your hands often
- Keep C-section incisions, vaginal or perineal tears and other wounds clean
- Avoid using tampons

FACT:

Women in the United States are more likely to die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth than women in any other developed nation.



ENDSEPSIS

The Legacy of Rory Staunton

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Sources:

The Commonwealth Fund. 2020. Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Primer.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021. Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System.

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