

September 2017 – Sepsis Awareness Month

Worldwide, sepsis is among the most common diseases with an estimated 31 million cases per year leading to six million deaths. In May 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) made sepsis a global health priority. More than 250,000 Americans die each year from septicemia, making it the third leading cause of death in the US after heart disease and cancer. In Vermont, the [death rate](#) from septicemia doubled between 2014-2015. One consequence of sepsis is patient suffering and extensive recovery time. It is also the most expensive condition treated in U.S. hospitals, costing more than [\\$20 billion](#) in 2011.



But, prevention efforts- especially education about warning signs - can dramatically affect a patient's outcome. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) promotes Sepsis Awareness Month in September to emphasize the importance of early recognition and treatment of sepsis.

Collaborative efforts on the part of clinicians, public health and policy makers aim to lower the effect of sepsis.

Clinicians working in a health care setting can influence patient outcomes by supporting the following prevention activities:

1. Vaccinate all eligible patients against diseases caused by germs like pneumococcus, meningococcus and influenza.
2. Refer patients to smoking cessation programs (because smokers have a higher risk for pneumonia).
3. Use precautions in the health care setting to prevent the spread of healthcare-associated infections.

The public health approach to prevention focuses on five key areas:

1. Increasing sepsis awareness among patients, families, and providers.
2. Promoting early recognition of sepsis, and aligning antibiotic stewardship efforts with early recognition.
3. Identifying at-risk populations for prevention and early recognition efforts.
4. Developing better sepsis surveillance methods to measure the effect of interventions to prevent sepsis.
5. Preventing infections that lead to sepsis, including infections caused by antibiotic-resistant pathogens.

Hospitals, including the University of Vermont Medical Center, have sepsis protocols in place, as do Vermont's Emergency Medical Services. Families who have lost loved ones to sepsis are creating foundations that support education and advocacy. Find more detailed information on the [CDC website](#).