



Sepsis/Infection

Whānau/Family Information – Neonatal Services

What is sepsis

Sepsis is a body response to an infection. Sepsis or infection can occur at different times during the neonatal admission. Early onset infection occurs within the first three days after birth. It is more likely to be associated with breathing problems and is often due to organisms (bugs) commonly found in the birth canal. Late onset infection occurs from three days onwards. The offending organisms first colonise the skin and gut of pēpi/baby and may later get into the pēpi bloodstream. This is more likely to happen through a skin puncture or line that is needed to care for your pēpi. All pēpi with infection can become very unwell and need special treatment.

How do they present

A pēpi with sepsis may initially show subtle changes. Parents and or the pēpi nurse may consider pēpi to be 'off colour' or 'peaky', being quieter than usual, and the pēpi colour is pale or mottled. Other signs may occur later, such as an unstable temperature (sometimes high and sometimes low), an increased heart rate and more rapid breathing. Or it may be the reverse, and pēpi can have bradycardia (a slow heart rate) and apnoeas (prolonged pauses in breathing). All these signs lead the medical staff to suspect infection. When apnoeas and bradycardic events occur too frequently, it will be necessary to assist pēpi with either CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) or ventilation.

What tests are required

- Bloods
- Urine
- Secretions from the lungs
- X-rays
- Lumbar puncture – depending on the early results

Whilst awaiting these results, pēpi will commence antibiotic treatment, which will continue for at least 24-48 hours.

Treatment

Treatment will commence before results are back.

Some pēpi require oxygen or ventilatory support initially.

If feeding has to be withheld, your pēpi will have intravenous fluids to maintain his/her nutrition and this will be reassessed at least daily. Whilst unwell, it is most likely pēpi will be nursed in an incubator, as this can assist with temperature control and gives the nurse easier visibility. pēpi will also be on a monitor. Your participation in care will continue, and pēpi cues will be observed to help decide when the most appropriate time is to continue with cuddles.

How long will treatment continue

If test results indicate there is no infection present antibiotics will be discontinued after 24-48 hours. If sepsis is confirmed antibiotics will continue for 5-7 days. Any pēpi that is feeding well and is not too sick can be with their mother on the postnatal ward while having antibiotics. It is impossible to prevent all infection, but by careful hand washing before handling pēpi and avoiding contact when we are unwell means the risk will be minimised.