Necrotizing fasciitis, the so-called “flesh-eating disease,” is a rare but serious infection. While many types of bacteria can cause this, a very severe form is caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, sometimes called “flesh-eating bacteria.”

The infection often begins like most others — through a cut or a scrape. However, unlike other infections, this one spreads very quickly as the bacteria do their damage. They spread and release a harmful substance that destroys surrounding tissue and can enter the blood stream. Infection can also occur from surgery, childbirth, or any type of event that causes a trauma to the body. Necrotizing fasciitis is not contagious, nor is it communicable.

The bacteria “eat away” at muscles, skin and underlying body tissues. Doctors must act fast to stop the spread of the infection before it spreads and before sepsis develops.

Sometimes incorrectly called blood poisoning, sepsis is the body’s often deadly response to infection or injury. Sepsis kills and disables millions and requires early suspicion and rapid treatment for survival. Worldwide, one-third of people who develop sepsis die. Many who do survive are left with life-changing effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chronic pain and fatigue, organ dysfunction (organs don’t work properly) and/or amputations.

What Are the Symptoms of Necrotizing Fasciitis?

The symptoms of necrotizing fasciitis infection are much like any type of infection, but they appear more rapidly and are more intense:

- Small, red, painful lump or bump on the skin
- Changes to a very painful bruise-like area and grows rapidly, sometimes in less than an hour
- The center may become black and die
- The skin may break open and ooze fluid
- Severe pain

Other symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Weakness
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
RISK GROUPS

This type of infection, although rare, can happen to anyone at any time. Therefore, it would be important to look at anyone who may be a higher risk of developing any type of infection. These are people who:

- Share personal items, such as towels, razors, etc.
- Have impaired immune systems
- Are very young or old
- Are hospitalized or in close quarters, such as prisons and dormitories

Patients in hospitals or healthcare facilities can contract an infection through various ways, such as:

- Surgical wound or puncture wound (intravenous, injection, biopsy needle)
- Urinary catheters

Good hygiene always and quick response to injuries may help reduce the risk of developing an infection.

PROGNOSIS

Once the infection has been stopped, there should be no further problems from the infection itself. However, there may be lasting effects from the treatments, particularly if they included surgery to remove large amount of tissue or amputations. If the infection is not treated quickly enough or properly, the result is often death.

WHAT IS SEPSIS

SEPSIS is the body’s overwhelming and life-threatening response to infection, which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, and death.

What are the signs and symptoms of sepsis?

Sepsis is a toxic response to an infection. There is no single sign or symptom of sepsis. It is, rather, a combination of symptoms.

Sepsis symptoms can include ANY of the following:

- S - Shivering, fever, or very cold
- E - Extreme pain or general discomfort ("worst ever")
- P - Pale or discolored skin
- S - Sleepy, difficult to rouse, confused
- I - "I feel like I might die"
- S - Short of breath

SEPSIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

IF YOU SUSPECT SEPSIS, CALL 9-1-1 OR GO TO A HOSPITAL

To learn more about sepsis, or to read tributes and survivor stories, visit us online at Sepsis.org