A virus is a tiny agent that lives inside living cells (host cells). Viruses need living cells in order to replicate or reproduce. There are thousands of viruses, some more common (like the flu and the common cold) than others (like Ebola and HIV). Almost any virus can lead to sepsis. Viral infections that may be minor in healthy individuals can be severe for people who have a weakened immune system.

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 treatment for survival.

Sepsis and septic shock can result from an infection anywhere in the body, such as pneumonia, influenza, or urinary tract infections. While bacterial infections are the most common cause of sepsis, viral infections can cause sepsis too. 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.

EXAMPLES OF VIRAL INFECTIONS

Viruses “hijack” normal, living cells in your body. They use these cells to replicate and multiply, eventually destroying the host cell — this is what makes you sick. Unlike bacterial infections that respond to antibiotics, viral infections are not so easy to treat. Many, like colds, run their course and your body heals on its own, but others, like HIV, do not.

Some of the more common viruses include:

- Influenza (the flu)
- HIV, which can lead to AIDS
- Meningitis (there is also bacterial meningitis)
- Pneumonia (there is also bacterial pneumonia)
- Human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Herpes
- Rotavirus
- Chicken pox

PREVENTION

Viruses are spread in different ways, depending on the virus. Hepatitis C, a liver disease, is spread through body fluid. Influenza can be spread by coming in contact with the virus that has been left behind on an object, like a phone, or through droplets in the air after someone with the flu sneezes or coughs in front of you. Not all viral infections can be prevented, but you can reduce your risk of contracting a virus:

- Stay up-to-date with all recommended vaccines, even adults
- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid contact with people who are ill
- Don’t share personal items
SYMPTOMS

The signs and symptoms of a viral infection depend on what virus you have and how it affects your body. Here are two examples:

Influenza: Fever, muscle ache, cough, sore throat, and headache.

Meningitis: Stiff neck, headache, fever, nausea & vomiting, rash, sensitivity to light, and confusion.

SEPSIS IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

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

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

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