



Press release
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Preparedness to Prevent and Treat Sepsis Is Essential to Save Lives, COVID-19 Pandemic Shows

Sepsis is the body response to severe infections, leading to the shutdown of organs and death. The strategic uptake of sepsis prevention and treatment measures by health systems is more urgent than ever, as research confirms COVID-19 causes death and disability due to sepsis.

At the occasion of World Sepsis Day on September 13th, the Global Sepsis Alliance reminds governments, health authorities, professionals, and all stakeholders that sepsis must be treated as a global health emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that infectious diseases – whether communicable or not – continue to represent a global threat, and that sepsis prevention and treatment are part of the solution.

“The 2020 World Sepsis Day occurs at a time when mankind faces one of the greatest pandemics of recent times. Severe infections with COVID-19 are in fact viral sepsis – which is often not recognized”, says GSA President, Prof. Konrad Reinhart, “Severely ill COVID-19 patients and those affected by sepsis from other pathogens – such as bacteria, other viruses, fungi, or parasites – are indistinguishable on clinical grounds.”

In the first six month of the pandemic, there were 17.3 million confirmed COVID-19 infections and 673,833 reported deaths¹, according to the Coronavirus Resource Centre of the John Hopkins University. Yet, in the same six months in 2017 there were close to 25 million ‘non-COVID’ sepsis cases resulting in an estimated 5.5 million deaths, as reported in a major recent study published in The Lancet². Beside causing death, COVID-19 also contributes to the enormous burden of sepsis through the long-term effects of COVID-19 induced sepsis. The long-term consequences of sepsis are already well-known. Up to 50% of sepsis survivors suffer long-term physical, cognitive, and psychological sequelae. Critically ill COVID-19 patients have similar long-term effects such as chronic

¹ <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

² Rudd, K.E., *Global, regional, and national sepsis incidence and mortality, 1990-2017: analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study*. The Lancet (British edition), 2020. **395**(10219): p. 200 - EOA.

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We support
World Sepsis Day – September 13
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fatigue, muscle weakness, loss of sense of smell, and concentration difficulties and according rehabilitation requirements.

“In such a historical moment where governments are expected to strengthen national health systems, we demand that they foster preparedness to tackle life-threatening infectious diseases, prevent and treat sepsis.”- continued Prof. Reinhart, “Healthcare systems which can adequately care for patients with sepsis are also more likely to adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and future emerging infections.”

Specific therapies for COVID-19 are yet to be found, but the demonstrated success of corticosteroids suggests that, as for sepsis, modulating the immune system’s response improves survival in COVID-19. “There is no approved medicine to cure sepsis though” – added Prof. Niranjana “Tex” Kisson, Vice President of the Global Sepsis Alliance, “Early administration of appropriate antimicrobials helps treatment in case of bacterial infections, but above all prevention and early recognition are key. This is why awareness, training of medical professionals, and funds for research on sepsis are essential to save lives.”

Sepsis is a devastating condition resulting from the dysregulated immune system response to infections, which leads to organ failure and death. Each year sepsis affects close to 50 million people globally of which more than 40% are children under age 5. While the burden is concentrated in low- and middle-income countries, sepsis remains also a leading cause of death in high-income countries. Overall, sepsis causes or contributes to over 11 million death each year. However, the majority of deaths due to sepsis are preventable.

In 2017, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on sepsis that urges WHO members “to include prevention, diagnosis and treatment of sepsis in national health systems”. “We notice a growing attention to sepsis from authorities, also thanks to the advocacy efforts of GSA, its regional alliances, and its individual members” – concluded Dr Kisson, “However, to date only few countries have undertaken concrete steps. The COVID-19 pandemic should be a stimulus for national authorities to develop national sepsis plans.”

The GSA calls on government, regional, and global institutions such as WHO to increase their focus and allocate more resources to the fight against sepsis. These efforts will strengthen the response against COVID-19 and are key to achieve improved survival rates for COVID-19 patients. We also call all stakeholders to support the World Sepsis Day Movement and the GSA to raise awareness about sepsis worldwide throughout the month of September and beyond.



Who We Are

The Global Sepsis Alliance is a non-profit charity organization with the mission to provide global leadership to reduce the worldwide burden of sepsis. The GSA is the initiator of World Sepsis Day on September 13 and World Sepsis Congress, a series of free online congresses bringing knowledge about sepsis to all parts of the world, among other initiatives. The GSA works closely with its over 100 member organizations, patient advocacy groups, professional societies, healthcare authorities, and governments to implement changes on how sepsis is prioritized, diagnosed, and treated all around the world, guided by the WHO Resolution on Sepsis.

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