

Factsheet on sepsis in Malawi

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is caused by a severe infection which leads to blood poisoning and organ damage, and can be life-threatening. However most cases of sepsis in mothers and newborns are preventable and are easily treated with antibiotics for the mother, hygienic practices during birth (such as handwashing and clean equipment), and antibiotics for the baby^{1, 2, 3}.

How does it affect Malawi's newborns and mothers?

Sepsis is the third leading cause of newborn and maternal deaths globally^{3, 4}. Sepsis and other infections cause an estimated 20%³ of Malawian newborn deaths⁵, and 10% of maternal deaths across sub Saharan Africa⁴.

What can be done to prevent sepsis in Malawi?

Many of these deaths in mothers and newborns are caused by a lack of hygiene and infection control during and around delivery⁶, which could be prevented through simple interventions and by improving the quality of care around birth⁷.

Key life saving interventions are:

- @ Improve the use and quality of maternal and newborn health facilities, with early referral and treatment through quality delivery and postnatal care⁷
- @ Follow clean birth practices as recommended in the World Health Organization's six cleans⁷
- @ Avoiding infection is one of the best ways to prevent sepsis. In addition to the clean birth practices the following are also key⁷:
 - * Provide access to clean water and improved sanitation⁸
 - * Encourage good nutrition for mothers and early and exclusive breastfeeding for newborns to support a healthy immune system⁹
 - * Ensure a good supply of essential drugs and intravenous antibiotics to treat sepsis⁷

In 2014 Malawi committed to the Every Newborn Action Plan¹⁰. This strategy sets out the priority solutions and calls for a united effort to dramatically reduce maternal and newborn deaths, and preventable stillbirths. We must prioritise the evidence-based, cost-effective and feasible solutions in all health facilities that provide pregnancy and delivery services, as well as ensure better data collection on pregnancy outcomes to enable responsive action where it is most needed.



- The World Health Organization's Six Cleans⁷**
1. Clean hands of the attendant
 2. Clean surface
 3. Clean blade
 4. Clean cord tie
 5. Clean towels to dry the baby and then wrap the baby
 6. Clean cloth to wrap the mother

We must respect, protect, and count newborns and mothers! Learn about sepsis and take action!



Sepsis in Malawi

Newborn deaths due to sepsis (and meningitis and tetanus)(2013)^{5, a}	20%
Number of newborn deaths due to sepsis (and meningitis and tetanus) (2013) ⁵	2,800
Maternal deaths due to sepsis (sub-Saharan Africa)⁴	10%
Antenatal care of four or more visits (2014) ¹¹	45%
Skilled attendant at delivery (2014)¹¹	87%
Mothers and babies who received postnatal care within two days of birth (2014) ¹¹	72%
Early initiation (within one hour) of breastfeeding (2014)¹¹	75%
Exclusive breastfeeding for infants in the first six months (2014) ¹¹	70%

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Notes

^a Calculated using data from Liu et al⁵. The estimated total number of newborn deaths is 14,027, and newborn deaths due to sepsis infections is 2,808. $(2,808/14,027)*100 = 20\%$