

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### Physician Notes: CDC Urges Providers to Educate Patients on Sepsis Risks

A tickle of a cough, a slight splinter, a stomach ache, a urinary tract infection—what do these four everyday ailments have in common? They can quickly progress to a serious infection if misdiagnosed or left untreated, resulting in sepsis.

Sepsis happens when an infection ramps up quickly, causing harm to tissue and organs, yet may also lead to death in some cases. Though its symptoms are similar to other viruses, injuries, and diseases, patients should always be checked for this life-threatening illness. The most frequent symptoms are chills, pain, clammy skin, disorientation, shortness of breath, and an elevated heart rate.

"When sepsis occurs, it should be treated as a medical emergency," explains **Tom Frieden, MD, MPH**, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in a release about the Vital Signs issue. "Doctors and nurses can prevent sepsis and also the devastating effects of sepsis, and patients and families can watch for sepsis and ask, 'could this be sepsis?'"

The most recent issue of the CDC's Vital Signs focuses on preventing sepsis with education and advice garnered from research. With infographics, suggestions, and an overview of the four prevalent areas of infection that cause concern—"lung, urinary tract, skin, and gut"—the CDC hopes to lessen the risk by encouraging providers to educate their patients about the warning signs before sepsis sets in.

Some 80 percent of those who develop sepsis do so outside of a hospital, the study says, but it also found that seven of 10 infected suffered from chronic diseases and had recently visited a physician or hospital. Many of the patients who eventually succumbed to sepsis were often predisposed to it for other unrelated health reasons of age, disease, or "weakened immune systems."

**Resource:** For a closer look at the Vital Signs issue on sepsis from the CDC, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/sepsis/>.