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Be alert for sepsis symptoms

South Western Sydney Local Health District is urging the community to be alert to the symptoms of sepsis to help fight the potentially fatal disease on World Sepsis Day today (September 13).

The District's Clinical Program Manager, Clinical Governance, Vinstein Brillante said Internationally sepsis was recognised as a medical emergency where the body's response to an infection is so great that it starts to attack and injure its own tissues and organs.

"Any delays in identifying symptoms and starting treatment including antibiotics, increase a patient's risk of death, loss of limbs or other long-term disability," Mr Brillante said.

Clinical Excellence Commission Director Systems Improvement Dr Harvey Lander said sepsis symptoms to be alert for in very unwell adult patients with an infection included muscle pain, shivering, breathlessness, confusion or not passing urine for more than a day.

"If a child is unwell with an infection, look out for a very high or very low temperature, very fast breathing, confusion, a 'fit' or convulsion, mottled skin, lethargy, not feeding, and repeated vomiting as alert symptoms," Dr Lander said.

"The groups most at risk are the very young, those older than 65 years and people with weakened immune systems.

"We need everyone to consider 'could it be sepsis?' so, we can stop sepsis and save lives."

World Sepsis Day is a great time to remind health workers, patients and carers everywhere to be alert to the symptoms.

South Western Sydney Local Health District is recognising World Sepsis Day with information stalls and displays and staff participated in a photo competition to raise awareness.

"Sepsis is a very serious condition and not usually on the minds of families caring for a loved one, but sepsis moves rapidly and being alert to symptoms and getting anyone with signs to hospital is crucial to save lives and reduce harm," Mr Brillante said.

The Clinical Excellence Commission's SEPSIS Kills program aims to reduce sepsis-related harm to adults and children in NSW hospitals. The adult, paediatric, newborn and maternal sepsis pathways are tools clinicians use to recognise and treat sepsis effectively – this includes escalating sepsis cases to seek senior medical advice early.