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2026 Sepsis Awareness Survey

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Methodology

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The surveys were conducted online within the United States by YouGov Plc on behalf of Sepsis Alliance.

Total sample sizes were 2,504 (survey 1) and 2,628 (survey 2) among adults (18+). Fieldwork was between 22nd - 24th and the 24th - 26th of June, 2026, respectively.

The results were weighted to the US census for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and region. Surveys were conducted in English.

The survey questions were split into two separate surveys to prevent biases.

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Sepsis Background

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Sepsis is the #1 cost of hospitalization in the U.S. consuming more than $53 billion in in-hospital costs each year.[5,6]

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is the body's life-threatening response to an infection that affects 1.7 million people and takes approximately 350,000 adult lives each year in the United States.[3]

- Sepsis is the #1 cause of death in hospitals.[4]
- As many as 87% of all sepsis cases originate in the community.[3]
- Sepsis is a common and deadly complication of COVID-19.[1,2]
- Mortality rates are high. The risk of mortality from sepsis increases by 4-9% for every hour that treatment is delayed.[7,8,9]
- Sepsis affects over 49 million people worldwide each year and is the largest killer of children – nearly 3.4 million each year.[10,11]
- Every day, there is an average of 38 amputations in the U.S. as the result of sepsis.[12]
- Black and "other nonwhite" individuals have nearly twice the incidence of sepsis as whites (1.89 times the risk for Black individuals, and 1.9 times the risk for "other nonwhite" individuals).[13]
- Black patients admitted to the emergency room are assigned to significantly lower priority status and experience significantly longer wait times (10.9 minutes longer on average) as compared to case-matched white patients.[14]
- In the U.S., Black women are 3.3 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes, and American Indian and Alaskan Native women 2.5 times more likely, than white women.[15]

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Sepsis awareness among U.S. adults has reached a record high of 78% in 2026, up from 75% in 2025 and significantly up from 69% in 2024.

Though awareness of the term “sepsis” continues to grow, 77% of individuals could not identify four of the most common signs and symptoms of sepsis. Significant disparities exist across race, socioeconomic status, and age in both recognizing sepsis and knowing the signs and symptoms of sepsis.

Less than 20% of individuals are aware that sepsis is the leading cause of death in hospitals, and 30% were not even aware that sepsis is a medical emergency.

Key Findings

- Overall awareness of the term sepsis is at 78% among U.S. adults in 2026, which is higher than 2025 at 75%.
  - Those who identify as white are more likely to know the term sepsis compared to those who identify as Black or Hispanic (85% vs. 65%, 66%).
  - Household income of $80,000 or more annually were more likely than those with a household income of under $40,000 to know the term sepsis (84% vs. 70%).
  - Those with a post-graduate education were more likely than those with high school or less education to know the term sepsis (87% vs. 70%).
  - Gen Z is significantly less aware of the term sepsis than any other generation (69% vs. 79% Millennials, 81% Gen X, 81% Boomers).

Key Findings

- Only 23% were able to correctly identify all 4 common symptoms of sepsis. 52% knew temperature, 60% knew infection, 30% knew mental decline, and 51% knew that somebody had to feel extremely ill.
- 46%, were able to correctly identify the definition of sepsis while 30% did not know it at all.
- 19% stated they either have been told they were diagnosed with sepsis by a medical professional or felt they had the symptoms of sepsis.
    - 4% were diagnosed during their hospital stay
    - 1% were diagnosed and told after discharge
    - 14% were not diagnosed but believe they have had sepsis
- The number one leading cause of death in U.S. hospitals is sepsis, yet 82% either incorrectly identified something else or did not know.
- While 90% correctly believe that a heart attack is considered a life-threatening emergency, only 70% believe sepsis is.

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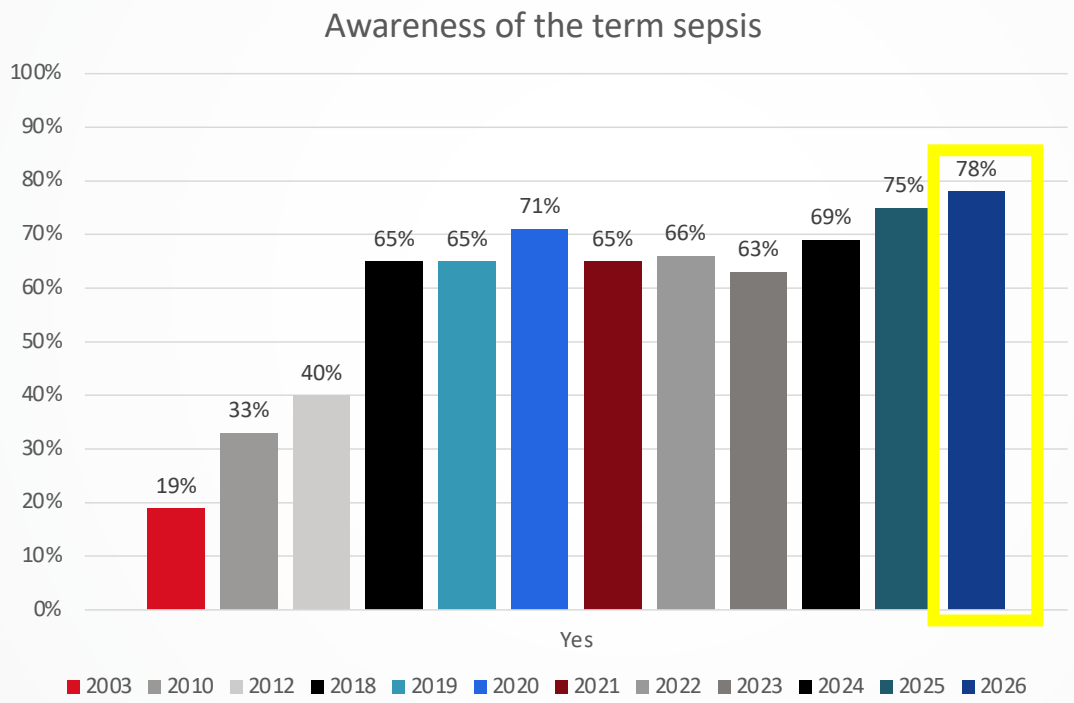
Study Details

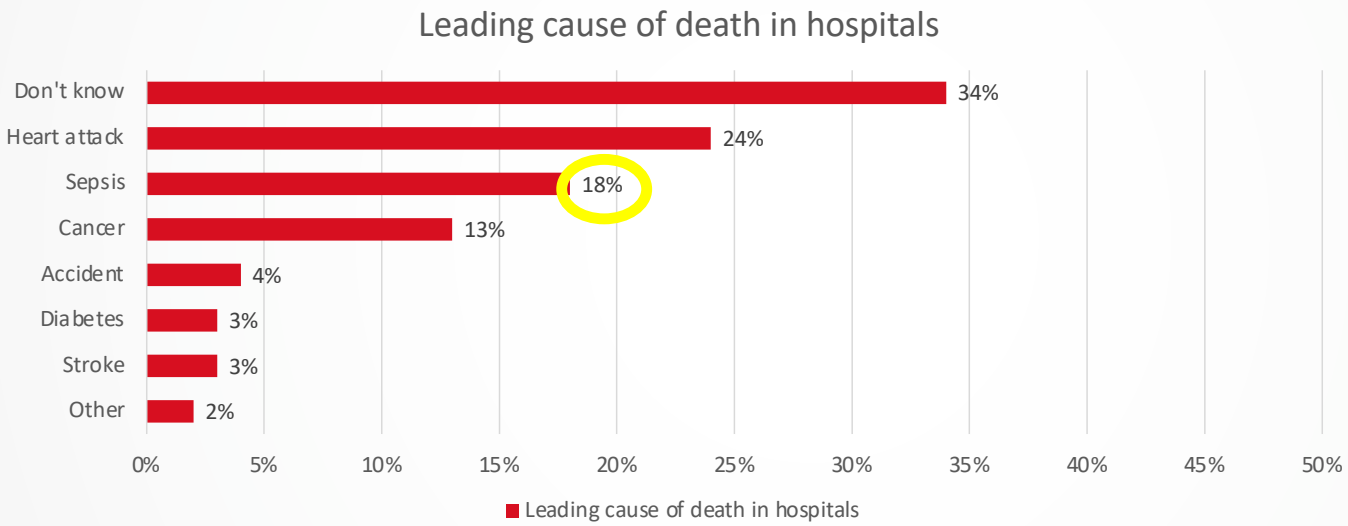
Public awareness of the term sepsis reaches new high



Q. Have you ever heard the term sepsis? N = 2,628

In 2012, the research was transitioned online from telephone.

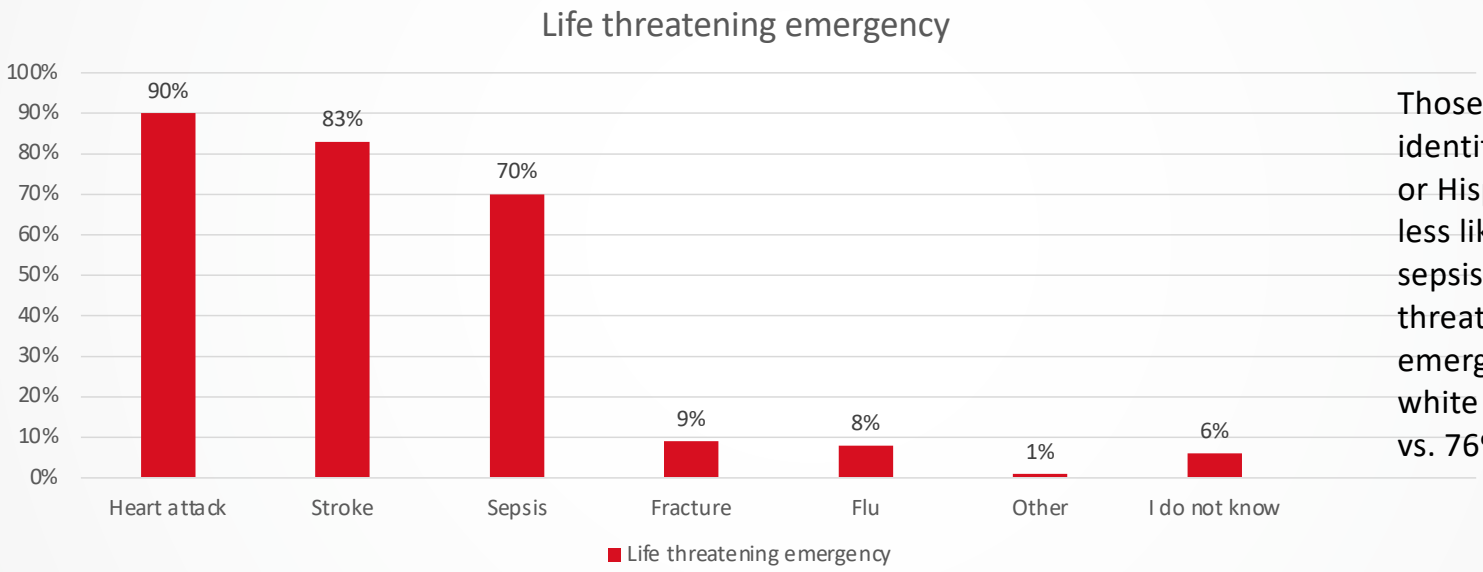
The majority of adults do not know that sepsis is the leading cause of death in hospitals



Only 13% with HS or less education said that sepsis is the leading cause of death in hospitals.

Q Which of the following is the leading cause of death in US hospitals?
N = 2,504

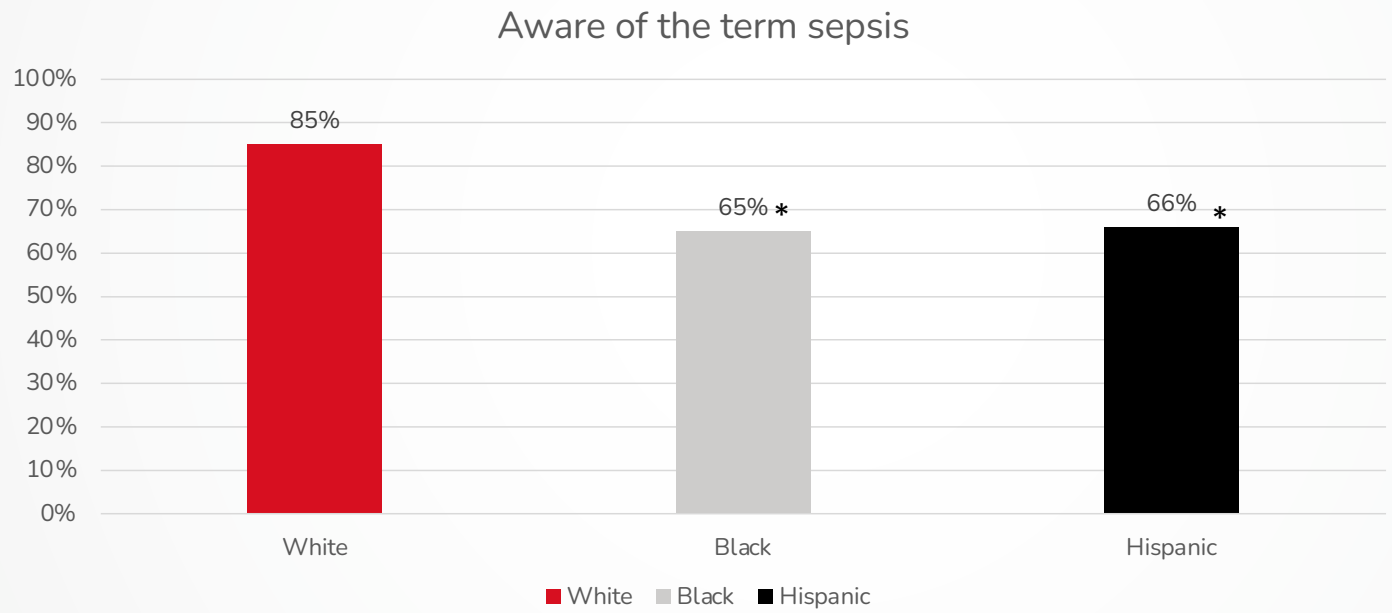
30% are not aware that sepsis is a life-threatening emergency



Those who identify as Black or Hispanic are less likely to think sepsis is a life-threatening emergency vs. white (58%, 56% vs. 76%)

Q Which of the following conditions is considered a life-threatening emergency? N = 2,504

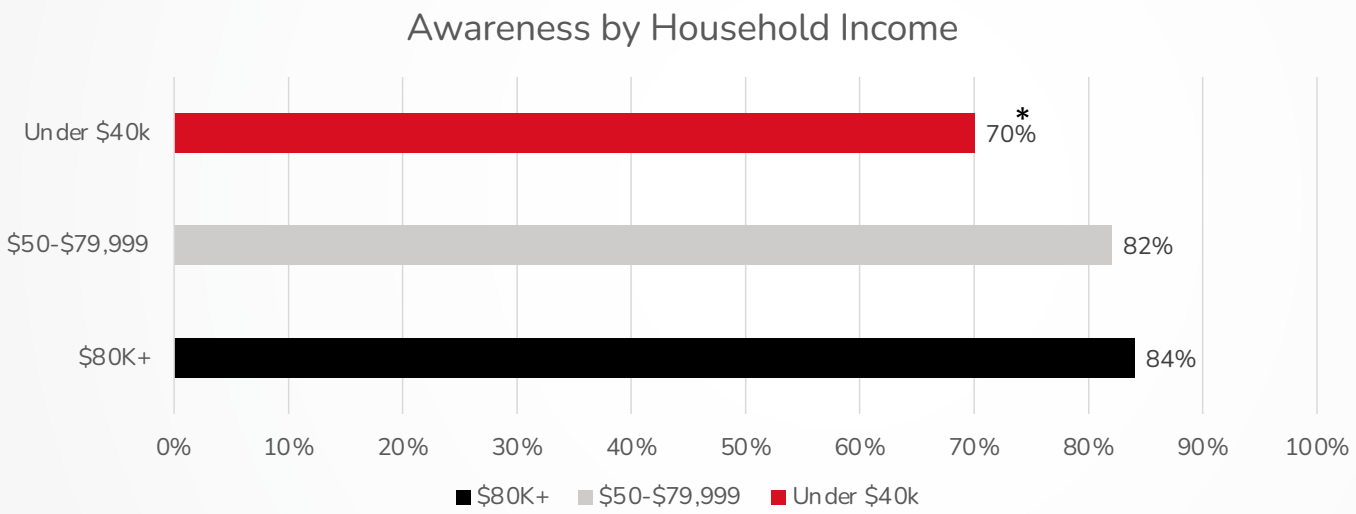
Those who identify as Black or Hispanic are significantly less likely to have heard the term sepsis than those who identify as white



Q. Have you ever heard the term sepsis? N = 2,628

* Statistically significant

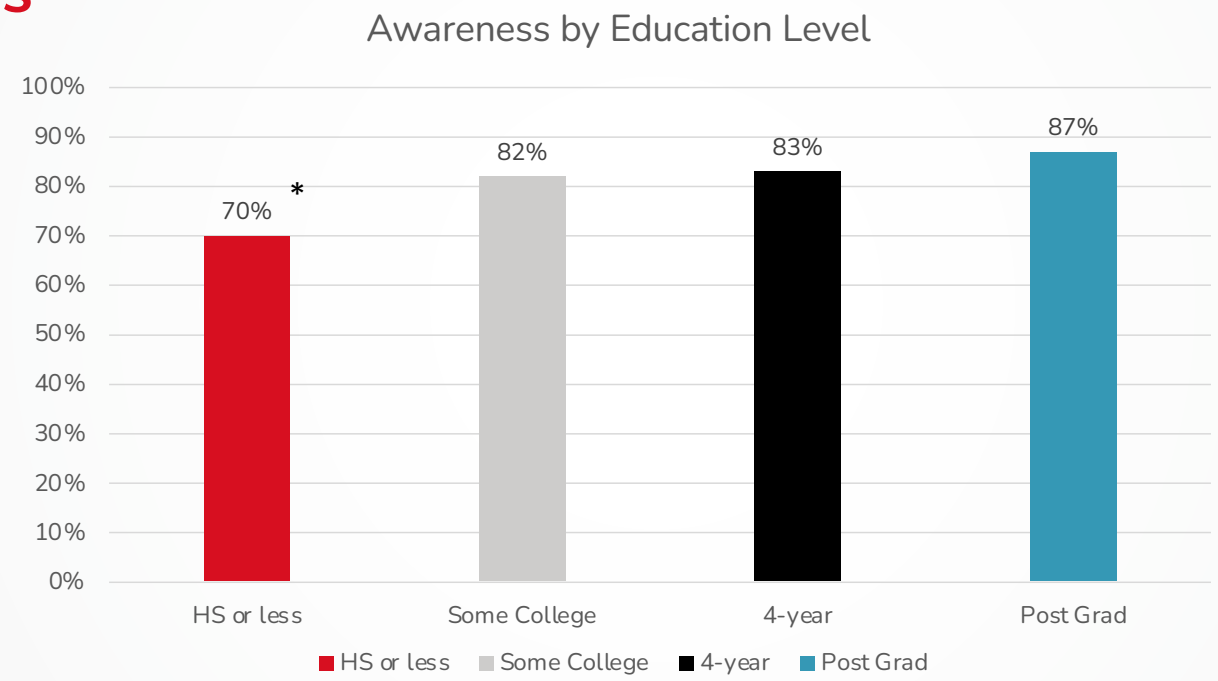
People with household incomes under $40,000 annually are much less likely to have heard the term sepsis



Q. Have you ever heard the term sepsis? N = 2,628

* Statistically significant

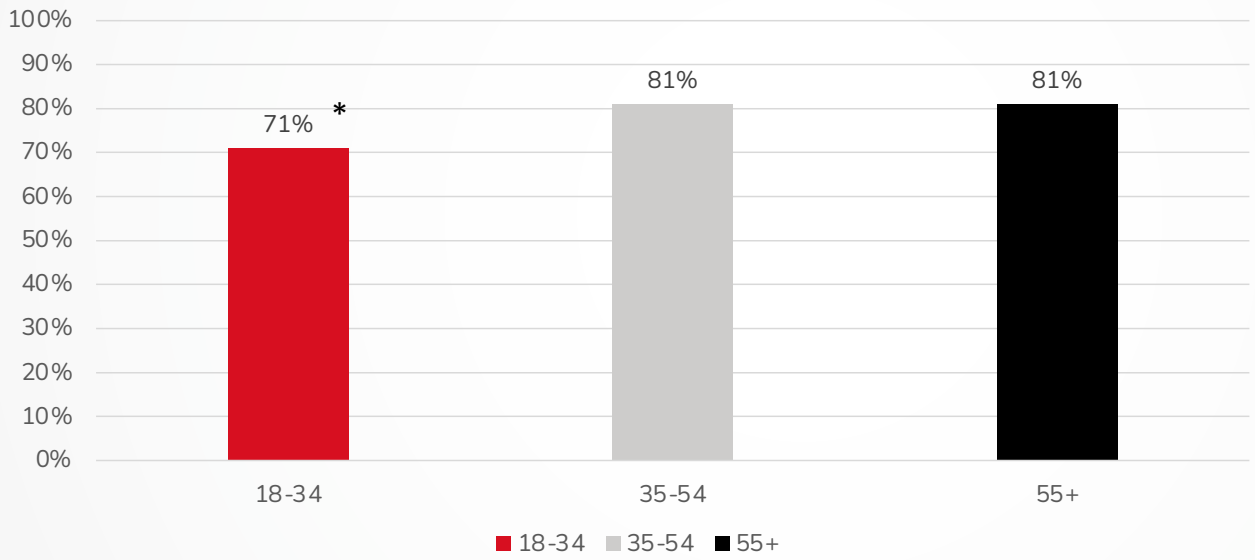
Those with lower education levels are less likely to have heard the term sepsis



Q. Have you ever heard the term sepsis? N= 2,628

* Statistically significant

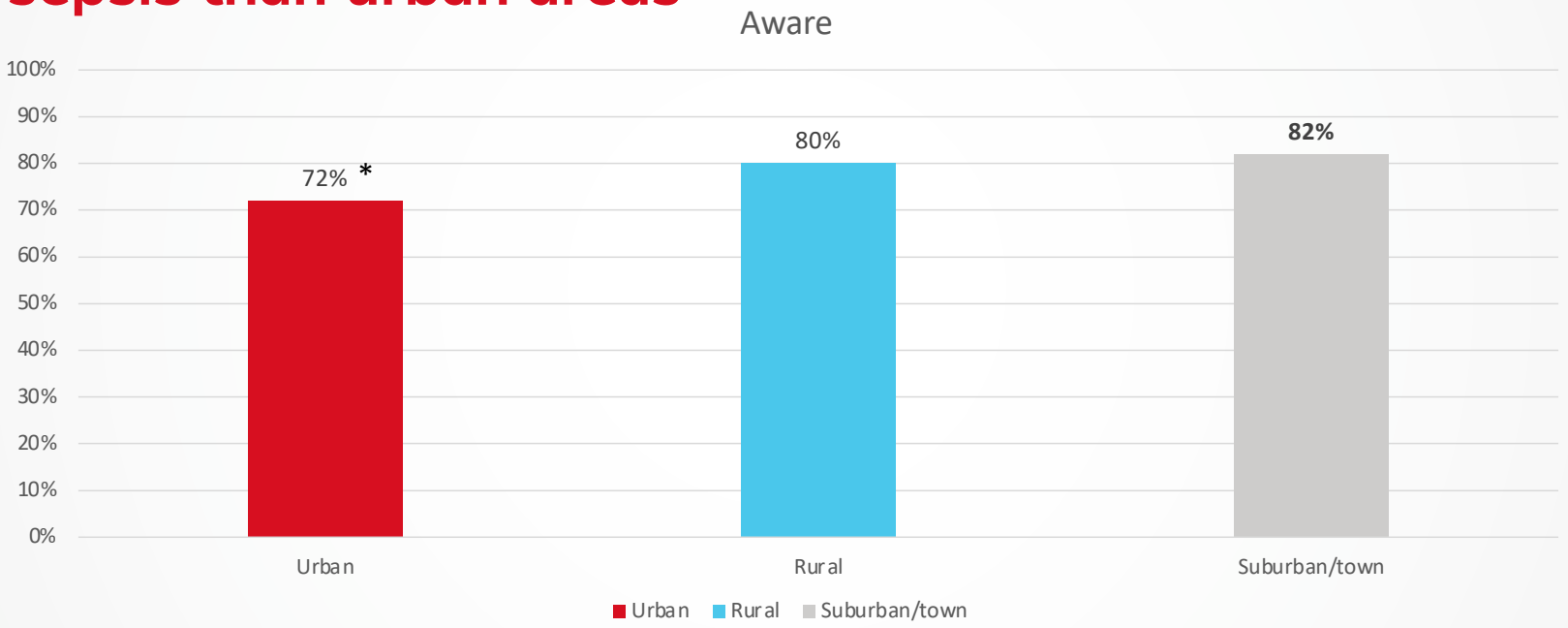
Those under age 35 are significantly less likely to have heard the term sepsis



Q. Have you ever heard the term sepsis? N = 2,628

* Statistically significant

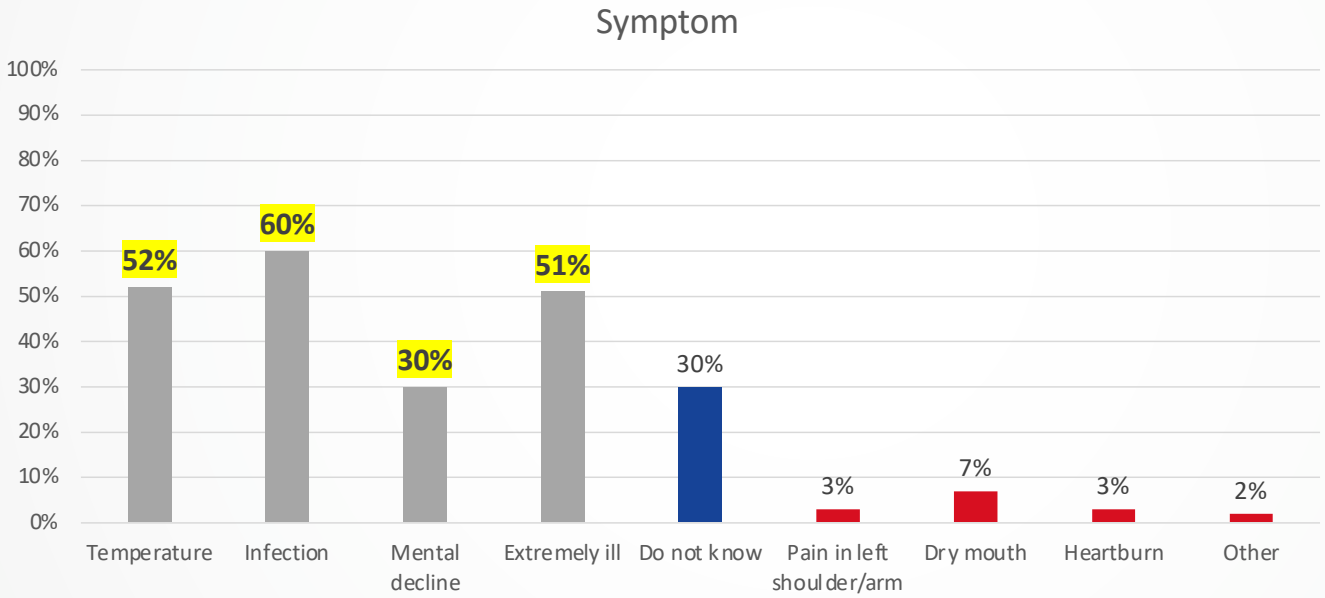
Those who live in suburban/town areas are more likely to have heard the term sepsis than urban areas



Q. Have you ever heard the term sepsis? N = 2,628

* Statistically significant

The majority (77%) were unable to correctly identify the four most common symptoms of sepsis

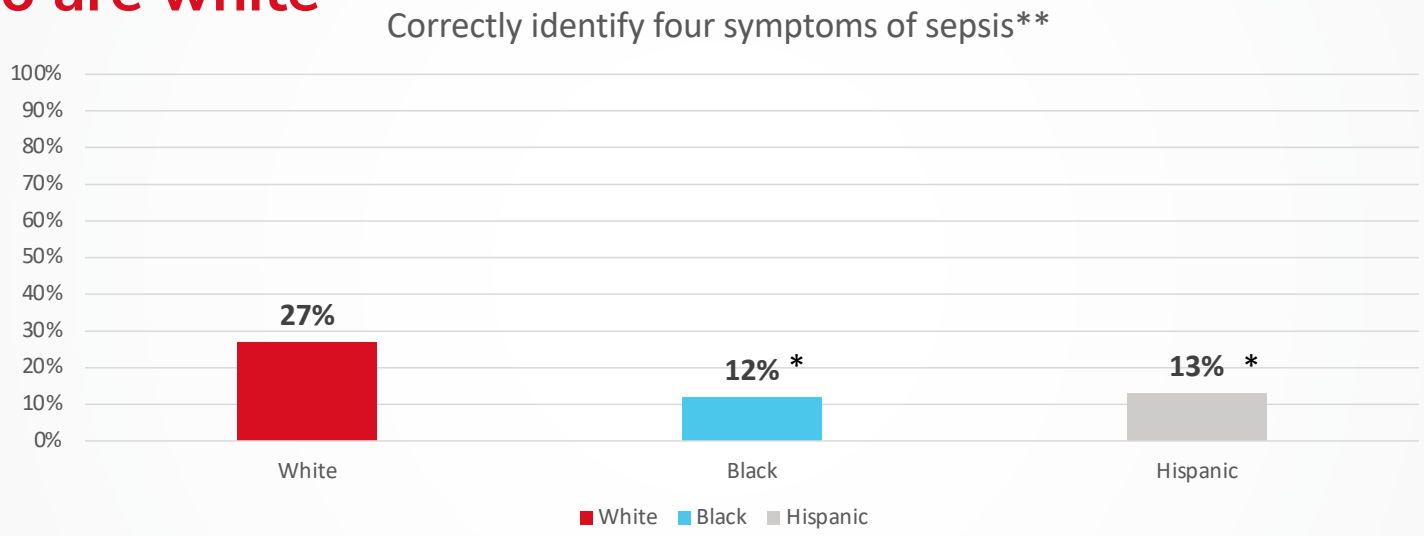


23% were able to correctly identify all four most common symptoms of sepsis

30% stated they did not know the symptoms of sepsis

Q. Which of the following, if any, are the symptoms of sepsis? Note: Yellow highlights indicate sepsis symptoms.

Black and Hispanic individuals are less likely to be able to identify all four symptoms of sepsis compared to those who are white

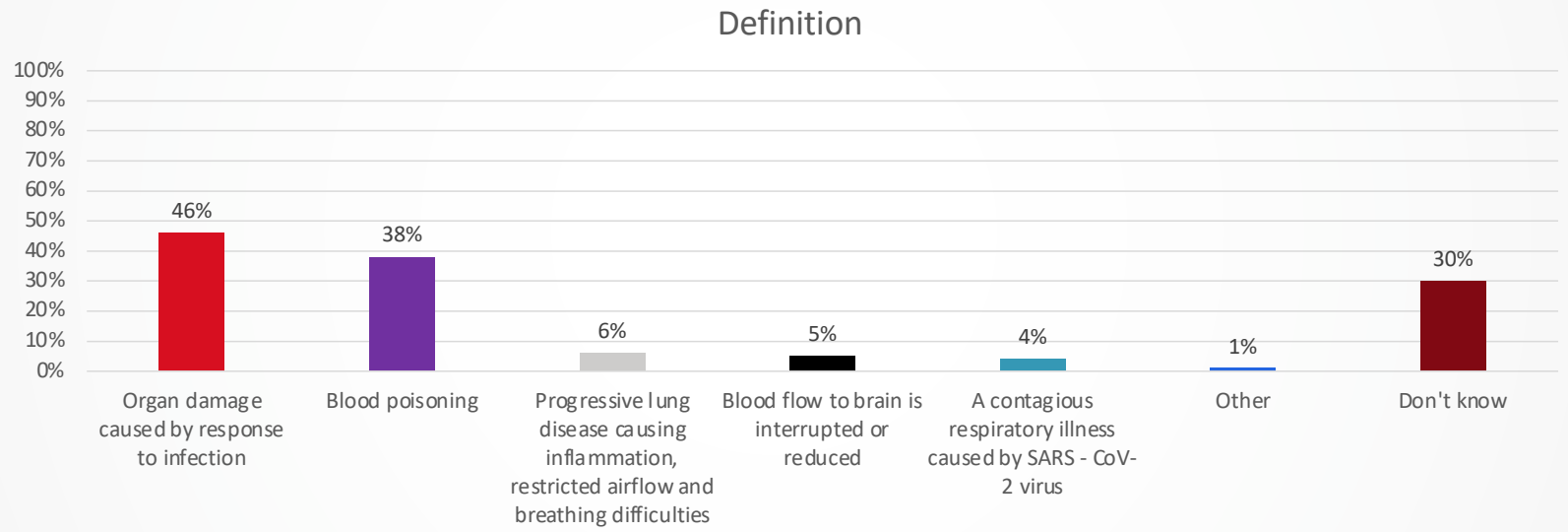


Q. Which of the following, if any, are the symptoms of sepsis? N = 2,628

* Statistically significant

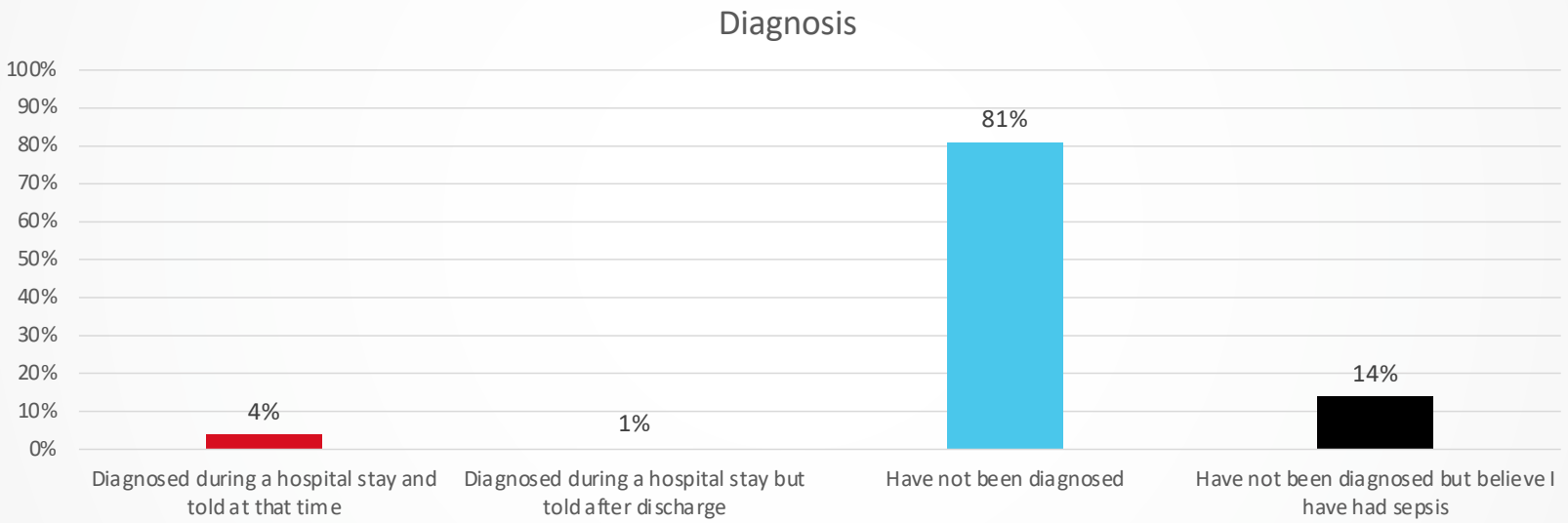
** Must have selected all four symptoms to be considered correct

Fewer than half of people can define sepsis correctly



Q. Which of the following, if any, are the symptoms of sepsis? N = 2,628

14% of people surveyed believe they had sepsis but never received a diagnosis



Q. Which of the following, if any, are the symptoms of sepsis? N = 2,628

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Survey 1 Demographics

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Demographics of the Survey*

- **Gender:**
  - Male: 49%
  - Female: 51%
  - Other: <1%
- **Age:**
  - 18 – 34 years old: 26%
  - 35 – 54 years old: 31%
  - 55+ years old: 43%

*All demographic information is self-reported. Due to rounding, numbers presented may not add up precisely to the totals provided.

Demographics of the Survey*

- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - White: 62%
  - Black: 12%
  - Hispanic: 18%
  - Other: 8%
- **Region:**
  - Northeast: 17%
  - Midwest: 21%
  - South: 39%
  - West: 24%

*All demographic information is self-reported. Due to rounding, numbers presented may not add up precisely to the totals provided.

Demographics of the Survey*

- **Annual Household Income:**
  - Under $40K: 32%
  - $40 - 79.9K: 26%
  - $80K+: 31%
  - Prefer not to say: 11%
- **Education Level:**
  - No HS or HS graduate: 37%
  - Some college: 29%
  - 4-year college graduate: 21%
  - Post-graduate: 13%

*All demographic information is self-reported. Due to rounding, numbers presented may not add up precisely to the totals provided.

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Survey 2 Demographics

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Demographics of the Survey*

- **Gender:**
  - Male: 49%
  - Female: 51%
  - Nonbinary: <1%
  - Other: <1%

- **Age:**
  - 18 – 34 years old: 27%
  - 35 – 54 years old: 32%
  - 55+ years old: 42%

*All demographic information is self-reported. Due to rounding, numbers presented may not add up precisely to the totals provided.

Demographics of the Survey*

- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - White: 63%
  - Black: 11%
  - Hispanic: 17%
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Demographics of the Survey*

- **Annual Household Income:**
  - Under $40K: 32%
  - $40 - 79.9K: 27%
  - $80K+: 30%
  - Prefer not to say: 10%
- **Education Level:**
  - No HS or HS graduate: 38%
  - Some college: 29%
  - 4-year college graduate: 21%
  - Post-graduate: 13%

*All demographic information is self-reported. Due to rounding, numbers presented may not add up precisely to the totals provided.

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