

# CAUSES AND COMPLICATIONS OF ARDS

## A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES

ARDS affects about 200,000 people in the United States and 3 million people worldwide every year. ARDS causes around 10% of all intensive care unit (ICU) admissions. It's the reason at least 25% of people require mechanical ventilation in a hospital setting\*

\*Cleveland Clinic

## ABOUT ARDS ALLIANCE

The ARDS Alliance is here to provide support and information to patients, relatives, loved ones, professionals and anyone who has had their lives touched by ARDS.

We regularly update our website and provide more detailed resources and articles for all elements related to ARDS and recovery.

If you have a suggestion, or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at:  
[contact@ardsalliance.org](mailto:contact@ardsalliance.org)

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## CAUSES OF ARDS

What causes acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS)?

- Sepsis: Sepsis is the most common cause of ARDS. It can happen when you have a serious infection in your lungs (pneumonia) or other organs with widespread inflammation.
- Aspiration pneumonia: Aspiration of stomach contents into your lungs may cause severe lung damage and ARDS. Aspiration is when food, liquid or other substances get into your airway and lungs.
- Blood transfusions: You're at risk for ARDS if you receive more than 15 units of blood in a short period of time.
- COVID-19: The COVID-19 virus may develop into severe ARDS.
- Pancreatitis: Severe inflammation in your pancreas.
- Major trauma or burns: Accidents and falls may directly damage your lungs or other organs in your body and trigger severe inflammation in your lungs.
- Inhalational injury: Breathing and exposure to high concentrations of chemical fumes or smoke.
- Drug overdose: An overdose on drugs like cocaine and opioids.
- Drowning or near drowning: Drowning causes water to get into your lungs, causing damage.

## COMPLICATIONS OF ARDS

What are complications of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS)?

Complications and problems from ARDS may develop while you're in the hospital or after you go home, like:

- Blood clots or deep vein thrombosis (DVT).
- Collapsed lung (pneumothorax). This may result from pressure applied by a ventilator to injured, stiff lungs.
- Confusion (delirium).
- Multiple organ failure.
- Muscle weakness.
- Scarred lungs or lung fibrosis.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

