

# HOSPITAL PHYSICIAN®

## EMERGENCY MEDICINE BOARD REVIEW MANUAL

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## Rheumatologic Emergencies

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

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The rheumatic disorders can affect multiple organ systems. Most often, patients presenting to the emergency department with a rheumatologic complaint have complications of a known underlying disease, usually rheumatoid arthritis or systemic lupus erythematosus. Patients also may present with the initial complaints of a rheumatic syndrome, but making a definitive diagnosis in the emergency department usually is not possible. Acute monarticular arthritis is a particularly important emergency entity because of the possibility of bacterial septic arthritis, which requires rapid identification and initiation of treatment to prevent destruction of the joint.

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#### II. SEPTIC ARTHRITIS

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- A. **Background.** Septic arthritis is an infection involving the synovial membrane and joint space. Bacteria are the most common pathogens. Microorganisms are most commonly introduced into the joint space by the hematogenous route. Direct implantation and extension from adjacent infection occur less frequently.
- B. **Infecting organisms**
1. Adults
    - a. *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* is the most common organism that causes septic arthritis. Sexually active women are most frequently affected. Joint involvement is typically