

Toxic Shock Syndrome

Frequently Asked Questions

What is toxic shock syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare but potentially serious illness that can develop quickly. TSS is caused by specific strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria that produce toxins.

Who gets TSS?

Anyone can get TSS, but many cases are associated with menstruating women using tampons or other intravaginal devices. Other cases of TSS are the result of infection from burns, insect bites or surgery. The risk of TSS is greater in younger people. TSS can affect anyone, and occurs when the bacteria enter the body and release toxins leading to TSS.

What are the symptoms of TSS?

Early symptoms of TSS are mild and similar to the flu and may include:

- Low grade fever
- Muscle aches
- Chills
- Tiredness
- Headache

As TSS progresses, symptoms may include:

- High fever (greater than 102° F)
- Vomiting
- Red "sunburn" rash
- Redness of the eyes, lips and tongue
- Light-headed or faint feeling
- Low blood pressure
- Mental confusion

How is TSS diagnosed?

TSS is usually diagnosed through blood tests. Since TSS has symptoms similar to many other illnesses, health care providers may test for other conditions such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever. If TSS has been caused by a skin infection, the site may be drained.

TSS can be mild at the beginning and quickly become a serious, life-threatening illness, leading to organ failure and possibly death.

What is the treatment for TSS?

TSS is generally treated with antibiotics. People hospitalized with TSS may also be given intravenous (IV) fluids and other medications to maintain normal blood pressure. (NOTE—it is very important to finish your antibiotics, even if you begin to feel better, unless otherwise directed by your health care provider.)

Can people with TSS pass the illness to others?

The bacterium that causes TSS, *Staphylococcus aureus*, can be spread easily from person to person. TSS is not spread from person to person. Thorough handwashing is an important activity to prevent the spread of *Staphylococcus aureus* and other germs.

How can TSS be prevented?

- Handwashing
- Keeping skin wounds clean and covered with a bandage
- Checking skin wounds for signs of infection
- Using low absorbency tampons and changing them often

Practice good handwashing habits (rubbing hands together under warm soapy water for at least 15 seconds or using alcohol-based sanitizer) after going to the bathroom, before preparing meals, before and after inserting tampons, before eating and after changing diapers.

It is also important to clean and bandage all skin wounds as quickly as possible. Call your health care provider immediately if a wound becomes red, swollen, or tender, or if a fever begins.

Where can I get more information on TSS?

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health www.nj.gov/health
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention www.cdc.gov

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care professional. Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.