Quick Facts

About… Toxic Shock Syndrome

What is Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare, life-threatening illness caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) bacteria. Although staph bacteria most commonly cause skin infections, certain strains of the bacteria can enter the body where bacteria are normally not found and produce a toxin (poison). When these toxin-producing bacteria enter the body, TSS can develop. TSS is most often associated with the use of super-absorbent tampons and sometimes with the use of diaphragms or other forms of birth control. Men, children, and non-menstruating females can also develop the infection if the bacteria enter the body through a contaminated wound, surgical site or the respiratory tract. This is an extremely rare condition, less than 5 cases are reported each year in the state of Indiana.

How is TSS spread?

Staphylococcus bacteria are commonly found on the skin and in the nose of many people but do not cause illness. TSS is not spread person to person, and it is not clearly understood why some people get TSS and others do not.

Who is at risk for TSS?

Very few people who come in contact with staph bacteria will develop TSS. Those at highest risk for TSS are menstruating women and women using certain birth control devices. Others at increased risk include persons who have undergone nasal surgery and those with bacterial wound infections.

How do I know if I have TSS?

Some of the symptoms of TSS are:

- High fever (sudden onset)
- Low blood pressure
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Sunburn-like rash, often on the palms of the hands or soles of the feet
- Fainting/feeling weak/dizziness
- Muscle aches
- Headache, confusion, or seizures
- Redness of eyes, mouth, or throat

How do I know if I have TSS?

If you feel that you may have an infection, it is important to seek medical attention immediately. Your health care provider may collect blood or samples from other

sites of infection to see if staph bacteria are present. Test results from bacterial cultures are not usually available for at least 24 hours following the test.
In some cases, the bacteria will not be isolated. A health care provider can diagnose TSS based upon an individual's symptoms.

How can TSS be treated?

TSS can be successfully treated with antibiotics if diagnosed early. Other medicines are often used to relieve symptoms. The removal of foreign objects from infected sites may also be necessary.

How is TSS prevented?

The risk of getting TSS can be reduced by changing tampons frequently, at least every 4-8 hours. It is also advisable to use the lowest absorbency tampon possible and to alternate using tampons and feminine hygiene pads whenever possible. It is possible to get TSS more than once. A female who has had TSS previously should not use tampons or internal contraceptive devices, such as sponges or diaphragms. Although rare, it is possible for anyone to develop TSS during the course of a staph infection. Therefore, precautions should be taken with wound care such as:

- Clean and bandage skin wounds.
- Change bandages regularly.
- Check wounds for signs of infection. If a wound gets red, swollen, warm or painful, or if a fever develops, call your health care provider right away.

Is there a vaccine that can prevent TSS?

There is no vaccine available to prevent TSS.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site on TSS at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/toxicshock_t.htm

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