



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

What is TSS?

TSS is a rare, life-threatening illness caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) bacteria. Although staph bacteria most commonly cause skin infections, certain types 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 wound, surgical site, or the respiratory tract. This is an extremely rare condition; fewer than 5 cases are reported each year in the state of Indiana.

What are the symptoms of 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, or dizziness
- Muscle aches
- Headache, confusion, or seizures
- Redness of the eyes, mouth, or throat

How is TSS spread?

Staph bacteria are commonly found on the skin and in the nose of many people, but they usually 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 had recent surgery and those with bacterial wound infections.

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 healthcare provider may collect blood or samples from other sites of infection to see if staph bacteria are present. A healthcare provider can diagnose TSS based upon a person's symptoms.

How is TSS treated?

TSS can be treated with antibiotics, if found 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 often, at least every 4-8 hours. It is also better 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 before 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 healthcare provider right away.

There is no vaccine available to prevent TSS.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/toxic-shock-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20355384>

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