

Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)



Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is a rare but very serious infection. Certain bacterial infections release toxins into the bloodstream, which then spreads the toxins to body organs. You may be at risk of TSS if you use super-absorbent tampons, have recently given birth, had surgery, a skin infection, or an abortion. TSS can quickly progress to a seriously life-threatening disease.

What causes TSS?



- ▶ TSS is caused by bacteria: *Staphylococcus aureus* (often called staph), *Streptococcus pyogenes* (often called strep or group A streptococci), or *Clostridium sordellii*. Most cases are caused by staph bacteria. These bacteria can normally exist on a person's body without causing infection.
- ▶ In rare cases, the bacteria and their toxins cause TSS by entering the bloodstream through:
 - ▶ Injured skin, such as cuts and scrapes, surgical wounds, and even chickenpox blisters.
 - ▶ The vagina or uterus, during childbirth, abortion, or use of tampons contraceptive products, catheters, or stents.
 - ▶ Other infection, such as pneumonia, sinusitis, or osteomyelitis (infection in the bone).

What are the signs and symptoms?



- ▶ TSS starts suddenly, often with:
 - ▶ A high fever.
 - ▶ Low blood pressure (with lightheadedness or fainting).
 - ▶ Diarrhea or vomiting.
 - ▶ Headache.
 - ▶ Sunburn-like rash on any part of the body, including the hands and feet.
 - ▶ Muscle aches.
- ▶ If TSS is not treated, it can cause organ failure, seizures, amputation, and death.

How is it diagnosed and treated?



- ▶ Doctors will start intravenous (IV) fluids and antibiotics as soon as possible, depending on your symptoms. They will also clean wounds and remove tampons or contraceptive devices. People with TSS usually need to stay in the hospital for several days.
- ▶ Doctors take a sample from the infected area to check for the bacteria that cause TSS. They also may take and test a blood sample to confirm a diagnosis.

How can TSS be prevented?



- ▶ Wash hands well and often to prevent the bacteria that cause TSS from spreading.
- ▶ Clean and bandage all skin wounds as soon as possible. Call your doctor if a wound gets red, swollen, or tender, or if a fever begins.
- ▶ If using tampons,
 - ▶ Change tampons every 4–6 hours.
 - ▶ Use the lowest absorbency tampon you can.
 - ▶ Consider using a pad instead at night or on low-flow days. Anyone who has had TSS should not use tampons.

