

Toxic Shock Syndrome

What is toxic shock syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a serious illness that affects multiple systems of the body and is caused by toxins released by certain bacteria. *Staphylococcus aureus* (commonly referred to as ‘staph’) and *Streptococcus pyogenes* (usually referred to as group A streptococcus or “strep”) are the two bacteria most often associated with toxic shock syndrome, although other bacteria can rarely cause the same symptoms.

Who gets TSS?

TSS is rare. Recognized risk factors for *S. aureus* TSS include: menstruating women using tampons or other inserted devices, women using diaphragms or contraceptive sponges, and persons (male and female) with *S. aureus* infection of some other body site. Streptococcal TSS is more likely to occur in the young or elderly, and in persons with underlying conditions that weaken the immune system.

How is TSS spread?

Although the bacteria that cause TSS can be spread from one person to another, TSS cannot be spread to others.

What are the symptoms of TSS?

Common signs and symptoms include fever, muscle aches, vomiting and diarrhea and a sunburn-like rash that later peels. Hypotension (low blood pressure), shock, multi-organ failure and death can occur.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

TSS can develop within 12 hours in some cases.

How is TSS diagnosed?

TSS is usually diagnosed by a physician based on an assessment of the patient’s signs and symptoms.

What is the treatment for TSS?

Treatment includes the use of antibiotics and supportive care, which are measures to help improve the signs and symptoms of the disease. Those may include intravenous (IV) fluids, medications to raise blood pressure, equipment to aid breathing, dialysis and other measures to counteract the effects of the toxins.

Toxic Shock Syndrome

August 2013 – page 2

How can TSS be prevented?

Some TSS can be prevented by not using highly absorbent vaginal tampons. Alternatives include using less absorbent tampons or by switching off between using tampons and absorbent pads during each menstrual cycle. Users of diaphragms and contraceptive sponges should follow the package instructions, which advise not to leave these in place for more than 30 hours.

Early recognition and treatment of staphylococcal and streptococcal infections may prevent serious complications.

How can I get more information about TSS?

- 1) If you have concerns about disease, contact your healthcare provider.
- 2) Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/LHD/index.htm>.