



Toxic shock syndrome (TSS)



Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a form of blood poisoning. It rarely occurs, but it can be fatal.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Symptoms come on fast and are often severe, such as:

- High sudden fever; sore throat.
- Flat, red, sunburn-like rash on the trunk of the body that spreads. The skin on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet peels. Redness of the lips, eyes and tongue may also occur.
- Muscle aches, extreme fatigue and weakness.
- Abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting.
- Low blood pressure. Rapid pulse.
- Dizziness, confusion, fainting.

CAUSES

Toxic shock syndrome is caused when certain bacteria release toxins in the blood. It can result from wounds or an infection in the throat, lungs, skin or bone. Until recently, it affected mostly women who used super absorbent tampons. These trapped and allowed bacteria to grow and spread. Now, TSS is more often due to post-surgery complications and other wound infections including a C-section surgery.

TREATMENT

Toxic shock syndrome requires emergency medical care.

TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Are signs and symptoms of toxic shock syndrome listed on this page present?

NO

YES

► GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE



Are any of these signs and symptoms present?

- Vomiting, then abdominal pain, and profuse, watery diarrhea.
- Muscle aches, headaches, sore throat, and “pinkeye” with a discharge that is clear.
- High fever without a skin rash, but with any other symptom listed in this question.

NO

YES

► SEE DOCTOR



Does a wound have increased redness, swelling and/or pain? Does puss or other fluid drain from the wound?

NO

YES

► SEE DOCTOR



USE SELF-CARE

SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

- Practice good hygiene. Wash your hands often.
- Keep wounds clean. See your doctor for signs of an infection (increased redness, swelling and/or pain, pus and/or fever).
- Don't use tampons if you've had TSS in the past.
- Change tampons and sanitary pads every 4 to 6 hours or more often. When you can, use sanitary napkins instead of tampons. Alternate tampons with sanitary pads or mini-pads during a menstrual period. Lubricate the tampon applicator with a water-soluble (nongreasy) lubricant, like K-Y Jelly®, before insertion.