

West Virginia Department of Health & Human Resources Information for the Public Regarding Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)

What is Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS)?

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare but serious disease that typically involves fever, shock, and multi-organ complications. TSS can be caused by types of staphylococci bacteria as well as some streptococcal bacteria. Some strains of these bacteria can produce toxins which cause TSS. TSS usually refers to staphylococcus toxic shock syndrome (STSS) while toxic shock-like syndrome (TSL) usually refers to streptococcus toxic shock syndrome. Clinically, the symptoms of STSS and TSL are very similar and hard to distinguish between. TSS may be deadly in up to 50% of cases and the condition can reoccur in those who recover. Complications such as organ damage, gangrene, and amputation can also occur from TSS.

What are the symptoms of TSS?

Symptoms of TSS may include malaise, headache, fever, low blood pressure, myalgia, diarrhea, confusion, nausea, vomiting, organ failure, redness of eyes, mouth and throat, and rash.

While in some cases blood cultures may be positive for staphylococcus aureus, there is no single test that can diagnose TSS. Since no single test can diagnose TSS, the healthcare provider will look for a few key indicators which include fever, low blood pressure, rash, and problems with the function of at least 3 organs.

How is TSS spread?

Risk factors for TSS include recent childbirth, menstrual period, infection with staphylococcus aureus, foreign bodies or packings inside the body, recent surgery, wound infection after surgery, and tampon use.

How is TSS treated?

Removal of materials such as tampons, vaginal sponges, or nasal packing is the most immediate treatment. If infection is at a surgical wound, drainage of infection site should also be an immediate treatment.

Treatment may be given for specific body functions. Your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics if an infection is present or give other medications to control blood pressure. Some people may need dialysis as TSS can often affect kidney function.

How can TSS be prevented?

You can lower your risk of developing TSS during menstruation by avoiding highly absorbent tampons and changing tampons frequently (at least every 8 hours). It is also recommended to only use tampons sporadically during menstruation.

What should I do if I think I have TSS?

If you develop a rash, fever, and feel ill, especially during menstruation and tampon use or following recent surgery and think you may have TSS, you should seek medical help immediately. TSS is a medical emergency and should be promptly assessed.