

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a serious illness caused by a toxin-producing form of *Staphylococcus aureus* (also called “Staph”). Streptococcal bacteria can cause another form of this illness (see the fact sheet for Streptococcal Toxic Shock). This syndrome first was recognized in 1978. Many early cases were associated with tampon use in menstruating women.

### Symptoms

Toxic shock syndrome can start quickly, as little as 12 hours after a surgery or anytime during a woman’s menstrual period. Symptoms include:

- Fever, often above 102°F
- Rash all over the body that looks like a sunburn
- Sudden decrease in blood pressure, which may cause dizziness or confusion
- Symptoms of multiple organ failure: profuse watery diarrhea, vomiting, making less urine, unusual bleeding, and disorientation or confusion.
- Peeling of the palms and soles of the feet can occur 1-2 weeks after the illness.

### Transmission

- Staph bacteria commonly colonize skin and mucous membranes (examples are mouth, nose, vagina) in humans. TSS can occur when the bacteria gets into the body, sometimes through a wound, or tear in the skin or mucous membrane.
- TSS is not transmitted from human-to-human.
- Most cases occur in young menstruating women and are associated with the use of high absorbency tampons. Although changes in the way tampons are made and used have helped to decrease the number of cases of TSS, cases related to tampon use still occur. The use of contraceptive devices that go inside the vagina has also been associated with TSS.
- Some cases occur after an infection of the skin or a wound, or after surgery.

### Treatment

- A doctor can diagnose TSS based on the symptoms, and sometimes by testing for staph bacteria in the bloodstream or a wound.
- Antibiotics are used to treat the infection. Many people with TSS are so sick they need intensive care and supportive therapies like intravenous fluids.

### Prevention

- Women should avoid using high-absorbency tampons. Read the instructions and make sure you do not wear a tampon for longer than you should. Choose the lowest absorbency tampon that fits your needs.
- Wash wounds with soap and water and keep covered with clean, dry bandage. Notify your healthcare provider of any wounds that do not heal on their own or when rash develops after a wound or surgery.

**All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.**



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