

# Toxic Shock Syndrome

## What is Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome is a disease caused from toxins made by bacteria (*Staphylococcus aureus* or Group A *Streptococcus*). Anyone can get toxic shock syndrome.

## Who is at Risk for Toxic Shock Syndrome?

People at risk for toxic shock syndrome are:

- women who use high-absorbency tampons during their periods
- women who use contraceptive sponges or diaphragms
- women who recently gave birth
- anyone who has had cuts or burns or skin abscesses
- anyone who has had surgery
- anyone who has a viral infection such as the flu or chickenpox.

Toxic shock syndrome does not spread from person to person.

## What are the Symptoms of Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Symptoms of toxic shock syndrome include:

- high fever
- chills
- vomiting (throwing up)
- watery diarrhea

- low blood pressure
- sunburn-like rash
- peeling or shedding skin
- sore throat
- muscle pain
- failure of internal organs
- increased redness and pain around a surgical site or other wounds such as cuts or burns.

## What are the Side Effects of Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Toxic shock syndrome can cause kidney failure and affect several organs (such as the heart or liver). If left untreated, toxic shock syndrome can lead to shock within 48 hours. It can also cause death.

## How is Toxic Shock Syndrome Found?

Your health care provider will check your symptoms. They may want you to provide blood and other samples to test for bacterial infection.

Your health care provider may want to swab your vagina, cervix, throat or wound for testing.

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## How is Toxic Shock Syndrome Treated?

- You will be treated with antibiotics.
- You may receive medicine to treat your blood pressure if it is low.
- You may receive intravenous (IV) fluids to treat dehydration.
- If you have kidney damage you may need dialysis. Your health care provider will talk with you about your specific treatment.

## How Can you Prevent Toxic Shock Syndrome?

- If you use tampons, read the labels and use the lowest absorbency tampon needed. Change tampons often, at least every 4 to 8 hours. Alternate using tampons and sanitary napkins.
  - Makers of tampons sold in the U.S. no longer use the design or materials that were linked with toxic shock syndrome.
- Wash your hands often. Wash before and after you have contact with wounds, after using a tissue, and after using the bathroom.
- Clean minor cuts, scrapes and burns with soap and water.
- Contact your health care provider if you have a serious wound.

## How Long Should Infected People Stay Home From Work or School?

Your recovery will depend on how severe your infection is. Your health care provider will give you guidelines about work or school.

**Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**