

Histoplasmosis Fact Sheet

Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by a fungus

The fungus grows in soil and material infected with bat or bird droppings. The fungus has been found in poultry houses, caves, bird roosts, attics, basements, and construction sites. The fungus becomes airborne when contaminated soil is disturbed. People get infected by breathing in the fungus. It is not passed from one person to another.

Anyone can get histoplasmosis

Histoplasmosis is seen more in the eastern and central parts of the United States. Both males and females of any age can be infected, but the chronic (long-lasting) lung form is seen more in older men. Outbreaks of histoplasmosis have occurred in areas where the fungus is known to live, from contact with bird, chicken, or bat droppings, or recently-disturbed contaminated soil (such as a construction site).

Histoplasmosis infection is common but histoplasmosis disease is not

Many people become infected with this fungus and never know it because they don't have symptoms. Symptoms, when they occur, usually appear from 3 to 17 days after a person has been in contact with the fungus. The disease (infection with symptoms) can range from a mild respiratory or flu-like illness, to a severe illness that spreads throughout the body and can cause death if it is not treated. It may also effect the eyes. Serious disease is more common in infants, and young children or adults with weakened immune systems (such as cancer or AIDS). The chronic form of histoplasmosis can sometimes be confused with tuberculosis.

Symptoms if they occur may include:

- Feeling tired
- Fever or chills
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Cough
- Chest pains
- Rash

Symptoms of more severe illness may include stomach complaints, weight loss, weakness, swelling of the lymph nodes ("glands"), liver, and spleen.

Tests are available to diagnose this disease

Histoplasmosis is diagnosed when it is seen in a specimen (such as blood or phlegm) that is specially stained (or dyed), by growing the fungus in the laboratory, or by blood tests. Signs of an old infection can sometimes be seen on a chest x-ray.

Histoplasmosis can be treated

Infection without symptoms is usually not noticed and is not treated. The disease (infection with symptoms) can be treated with "anti-fungal" medications. If eye disease is suspected an eye exam is needed.

Histoplasmosis can be prevented

Limit exposure to soil and dust from areas that may be contaminated (such as with bird and bat droppings). If working in these areas is necessary, use protective masks and spray the areas with water to reduce dust.