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What is histoplasmosis?

Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by *Histoplasma capsulatum*, a fungus that lives in soil. It also spreads in bird and bat droppings that mix in soil. Many people that breathe in the fungal spores do not become sick. Some people that are exposed develop symptoms ranging from mild flu-like illness to meningitis.

Who gets histoplasmosis?

Any person that lives in regions where this fungus is found in the soil is at risk of contracting this illness. *Histoplasma capsulatum* is found throughout the world and is common in many areas of the United States, including parts of Virginia. The fungus grows best in soil that contains bird or bat droppings, such as around old chicken houses, roosts of starlings and blackbirds, in decaying trees, and in caves where bats may live. Certain people are at increased risk for developing severe disease when exposed. These include people with weakened immune systems (e.g., people with HIV/AIDS, people who received an organ transplant, people taking certain medications), infants, and people aged 55 years and older.

How is histoplasmosis spread?

The fungus produces spores that get into the air if contaminated soil is disturbed. The infection occurs because the person breathes in the spores. Histoplasmosis does not spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of histoplasmosis?

Most people with histoplasmosis do not have symptoms. However, in people who develop disease, the most common symptoms include fever, cough, headache, fatigue, chest pain, and body aches. Some people might also experience joint pain. For most people, these symptoms typically go away on their own within a few weeks to a month. In people, especially those with weakened immune systems, histoplasmosis can turn into a long-term lung infection. Very severe cases can have spread of the fungus to other areas of the body, including the nervous system (brain).

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

If symptoms appear, they usually develop within 3-17 days after exposure.

How is histoplasmosis diagnosed?

Blood or urine samples can be tested for histoplasmosis. Other testing includes x-ray or CT of the lungs, testing fluid from the respiratory tract, and/or biopsy of an infected area.

What is the treatment for histoplasmosis?

Most people with histoplasmosis recover without treatment. Prescription of anti-fungal medications are used to treat severe or chronic lung infections and infections that spread to other parts of the body, like meningitis.

Do people who have been in contact with someone with histoplasmosis need to be tested and treated?

Histoplasmosis does not spread between people or between people and pets (cats and dogs).

How can histoplasmosis be prevented?

It is not always possible to prevent exposure to the fungus in areas where it is common in the environment. People should avoid areas with accumulations of bird or bat droppings, especially if they have weakened immune systems. If an area with bird and bat droppings needs to be cleaned, then a company that specializes in removal of hazardous waste should be utilized.

How can I get more information about histoplasmosis?

- If you have concerns about histoplasmosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. You can find your local health department at vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/.
- Visit the CDC page on histoplasmosis at cdc.gov/histoplasmosis/index.html for more information.
- Visit the CDC page About Histoplasmosis and Work for work related exposure prevention information at cdc.gov/niosh/histoplasmosis/about/index.html.

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