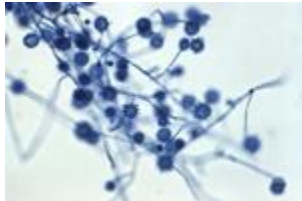


Histoplasmosis

What is Histoplasmosis?



Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by a fungus called *Histoplasma*. The fungus lives in the environment, particularly in soil that contains large amounts of bird or bat droppings. In the United States, *Histoplasma* mainly lives in the central and eastern states, especially areas around the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys. The fungus also lives in parts of Central and South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia.

How is it spread?

Histoplasmosis is airborne spread. If soil containing the *Histoplasma* is disturbed, the fungus spores get into the air and people can breathe in the air and get Histoplasmosis. It is not spread from person to person.

Signs and Symptoms

Most people who are exposed to the fungus *Histoplasma* never have symptoms. Other people may have flu-like symptoms that usually go away on their own. Symptoms of Histoplasmosis include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Chills
- Headache
- Chest pain
- Body aches

Symptoms of Histoplasmosis may appear between 3 and 17 days after a person breathes in the fungal spores. For most people, the symptoms of Histoplasmosis will go away within a few weeks to a month. However, some people have symptoms that last longer than this, especially if the infection becomes severe.

Treatment and Complications

For some people, the symptoms of Histoplasmosis will go away without treatment. Prescription antifungal medication is needed to treat severe Histoplasmosis in the lungs, chronic Histoplasmosis, and infections that have spread from the lungs to other parts of the body (disseminated Histoplasmosis). Itraconazole is one type of antifungal medication that is commonly used to treat Histoplasmosis. Depending on the severity of the infection and the person's immune status, the course of treatment can range from 3 months to 1 year.

In some people, usually those who have weakened immune systems, Histoplasmosis can develop into a long-term lung infection, or it can spread from the lungs to other parts of the body, such as the central nervous system.

Diagnosis

Healthcare providers rely on medical and travel history, symptoms, physical examinations, and laboratory tests to diagnose Histoplasmosis. The most common way that healthcare providers test for Histoplasmosis is by taking a blood sample or a urine sample and sending it to a laboratory.

Healthcare providers may do imaging tests such as chest x-rays or CT scans of the lungs. They may also collect a sample of fluid from the respiratory tract or perform a tissue biopsy, in which a small sample of affected tissue is taken from the body and examined under a microscope. Laboratories may also see if Histoplasma will grow from body fluids or tissues (this is called a culture).

Prevention

It can be difficult to avoid breathing in Histoplasma in areas where it is common in the environment. In areas where Histoplasma is known to live, people who have weakened immune systems (for example, by HIV/AIDS, an organ transplant, or medications such as corticosteroids or TNF-inhibitors) should avoid doing activities that are known to be associated with getting Histoplasmosis, including:

- Disturbing material (for example, digging in soil or chopping wood) where there are bird or bat droppings
- Cleaning chicken coops
- Exploring caves
- Cleaning, remodeling, or tearing down old buildings

Large amounts of bird or bat droppings should be cleaned up by professional companies that specialize in the removal of hazardous waste.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH www.michigan.gov/mdch

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov