

FACT SHEET

Histoplasmosis

Histoplasmosis is a disease found worldwide most often in river valleys of North America and Central America. The fungus called *Histoplasma Capsulatum* is a dimorphic (two forms) fungus that exists as a mold in the environment and as a yeast in humans or animals. This disease primarily affects the lungs: <http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/histoplasmosis/>

Symptoms: Some infected persons have no apparent ill effects. Symptoms in acute respiratory disease include fever, chest pains, and a dry nonproductive cough. Distinct patterns may be seen on a chest x-ray. Other symptoms can include chills, fatigue, headache, and bodyaches.

Spread: Histoplasma spores grow in the soil and material contaminated with bat guano (feces) or bird droppings. Breathing in the spores causes the infection. It is not spread from one human to another. When contaminated soil containing *Histoplasma Capsulatum* spores is disturbed the spores become airborne. This can happen during mining, construction, excavation, demolition, roofing, chimney cleaning, farming, gardening and installing heating/air conditioners. After the spores enter the lungs, a person's body temperature permits the spores to transform into yeast. The yeast then travels to lymph nodes and potentially spreads to other parts of the body through the bloodstream.

Incubation: If symptomatic, the symptoms usually begin 3 to 17 days after breathing in the spores. **An infected person is not contagious to others.**

Precautions: Certain people are at greater risk for developing histoplasmosis if exposed including: those who have weakened immune systems such as HIV/AIDS; transplant patients; infants; those taking steroids or TNF-inhibitor (medication to suppress tumors) and adults over 55 years of age.

Reportable: Within seven days healthcare provider or Laboratory need to report positive results to the state or local health department.

Diagnosis and Treatment: The physician will probably order a chest x-ray, blood tests, possibly a urine test, and/or a skin test. Antifungal medications are used to treat severe cases of acute histoplasmosis and all cases of chronic and disseminated disease. Mild disease usually resolves without treatment.

Prevention:

The best way to prevent the spread *Histoplasmosis* is:

- Avoid areas that may harbor the fungus, e.g., accumulations of bird or bat droppings.
- Before starting a job or activity having a risk for exposure to *H.capsulatum*, consult the NIOSH/NCID document

Histoplasmosis: Protecting Workers at Risk:

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs>