



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Histoplasmosis

What is histoplasmosis?

Histoplasmosis (Histo) is a disease caused by the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum*. The disease mostly affects the lungs, but may affect other organs as well. Some individuals develop an acute influenza-like illness, but some may develop a chronic illness.

What are the symptoms of histoplasmosis?

Most people with Histo have no symptoms and are considered asymptomatic. Some individuals may develop acute respiratory illness with fever, cough, chest pain, and fatigue. Others may develop a more chronic respiratory illness.

Patients with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk of the disseminated (widespread) and more severe form of Histo. These symptoms may include enlargement of the liver and spleen, hepatitis, pneumonia, meningitis, and ulcers on the mouth, tongue, nose and larynx.

How is histoplasmosis spread?

Histoplasma capsulatum is a fungus that lives in soil, especially moist soil that has been mixed with organic materials such as bird and bat droppings. It spreads as airborne fungal spores from soil enriched with bird or bat droppings. *Histoplasma capsulatum* does not infect birds and is not found in their droppings, but it can be found in bat droppings. *Histoplasma capsulatum* is found worldwide, especially in the Ohio River Valley and Mississippi River Valley in the U.S.

Histo spreads when people breathe in the airborne fungal spores, which are sometimes carried for long distances by wind.

Possible environmental sources of *Histoplasma capsulatum* are old buildings or sites that have recently undergone remodeling, excavation or construction and may have

contained bird roosts or bats, as well as poultry houses or farming sites with soil that may have been contaminated with bird and bat droppings and disturbed during digging or cleaning.

Who is at risk for getting histoplasmosis?

Anyone can get Histo, even people who are otherwise healthy. However, infants, young children, and older people, particularly those with chronic lung disease, are at increased risk for developing severe disease. Disseminated (widespread) disease is mostly found in people who have weakened immune systems, such as people with cancer or HIV/AIDS. Individuals who are going to clean up *Histoplasma capsulatum* contaminated sites should consult the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and the National Center for Infectious Diseases (NCID) booklet, *Histoplasmosis: Protecting Workers at Risk*. The NIOSH Internet home page is <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/>

How do I know if I have histoplasmosis?

Physicians use cultures, chest x-rays, blood tests, and urine tests to diagnose the disease in symptomatic patients.

How is histoplasmosis treated?

Most people do not require any treatment. For more severely ill, physicians may prescribe anti-fungal drugs.

How is histoplasmosis prevented?

Regular cleaning of poultry housing or cleaning up bird droppings, while wearing a mask, will prevent the environment from becoming optimal for fungal growth. The ground under known bird roosts should not be disturbed unless the ground can be kept moist to prevent dusty conditions. Workers who are cleaning up accumulations of bird droppings should wear a tight fitting mask and keep the soil and droppings wet to prevent dusty conditions and refer to the document listed above.

All information presented is intended for public use.

For more information, visit the Centers for Diseases and Control Prevention (CDC) Web site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/histoplasmosis/index.html>

ISDH Indiana Infectious Disease Report is located at:
<http://www.in.gov/isdh/20667.htm>

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