

Histoplasmosis

FACTSHEET

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Division of Epidemiology, Disease Surveillance and Investigation
899 N. Capitol Street NE, Suite 580
Washington, D.C. 20002
202-442-9371 Fax 202-442-8060 *
www.dchealth.dc.gov

What is Histoplasmosis?

Histoplasmosis is a disease caused by fungus. There are several forms of the disease and multiple body organs can be affected. The form most commonly seen is the one involving the lungs. The form that involves multiple body organs is called disseminated histoplasmosis, and it can be fatal if not treated.

Who gets Histoplasmosis?

Anyone exposed to the bacterium that causes histoplasmosis can get the disease. Infants, young children, and the elderly, in particular those with chronic lung disease are at increased risk for the more severe form of the disease. Disseminated histoplasmosis is more frequently seen in people with cancer or AIDS.

What are the symptoms of Histoplasmosis?

Most infected persons have no apparent ill effects. Respiratory symptoms, a general ill feeling, fever, chest pains, and a dry or nonproductive cough characterize the acute respiratory disease. When this disease affects the lungs it can be mistaken for tuberculosis. The lung damage can worsen over months or years.

How is Histoplasmosis spread?

The fungus that causes Histoplasmosis grows in soil and material contaminated with bat or bird droppings. The fungus is spread through the air when the contaminated soil is disturbed. Histoplasmosis is acquired by inhaling (breathing in) the germ. The disease is not spread from person to person.

How soon do symptoms appear?

If symptoms occur, they will start within three to seventeen days after having contact with the fungus.

Is a person with Histoplasmosis contagious?

No, the disease is not spread from person-to person.

How is Histoplasmosis treated?

There are several anti-fungal medications that can be used in the treatment of severe acute Histoplasmosis and all cases of chronic and disseminated disease. Mild disease usually does not require treatment.

Should a person with Histoplasmosis be excluded from work or school?

It is not necessary to exclude a person with histoplasmosis from work or school.

How can Histoplasmosis be prevented?

Decrease your risk of being infected with Histoplasmosis by avoiding areas contaminated with bird or bat droppings. Minimize exposure to dust in a contaminated environment, such as chicken coops and their surrounding soil. The area can be sprayed with water to minimize dust production. Use protective masks when indicated.

Want more information?

Additional information about histoplasmosis and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-5842/9371.

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