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What is histoplasmosis?

Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum*. This fungus lives in the environment, especially in soil that contains large amounts of bird or bat droppings, and enters the body through the lungs. Many people with infection do not become sick, or they develop mild flu-like illness. Some people might develop pneumonia. Rarely, the fungus can spread to other organs and cause other symptoms.

Who gets histoplasmosis?

Anyone can get histoplasmosis, even people who are otherwise healthy, if he or she has been in an area where the fungus lives in the environment. *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 and other areas where bats live. Certain people are at increased risk for developing severe disease. These include people with weakened immune systems (e.g., people with HIV/AIDS, people who have an organ transplant, people taking medications that weaken the immune system), infants, and people aged 55 years and older.

How is histoplasmosis spread?

The fungus grows in soil that has been enriched with bird or bat droppings. The fungus produces spores that get into the air if the contaminated soil is disturbed. Breathing in these spores causes infection. You cannot get histoplasmosis from another person.

What are the symptoms of histoplasmosis?

Many people who are infected with the fungus do not show any symptoms. In people who develop disease, the most common symptoms are similar to those of the flu, and include fever, a dry or nonproductive cough, headache, fatigue, chest pain, and body aches. Some people might also experience joint pain. For most people, these symptoms will usually go away on their own within a few weeks to a month. For certain people, especially those with weakened immune systems, the fungus can spread from the lungs to other organs.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

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

How is histoplasmosis diagnosed?

Multiple laboratory tests are available to diagnose histoplasmosis. These include fungal culture or microscopic examination of blood, other body fluids, or tissues, urine tests to detect *Histoplasma*,

and serologic tests to identify *Histoplasma* antibodies.

What is the treatment for histoplasmosis?

Treatment is not usually necessary for histoplasmosis because most people will recover without treatment. Prescription anti-fungal medications are used to treat severe or chronic cases of histoplasmosis.

How can histoplasmosis be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent histoplasmosis, and it is not always possible to prevent exposure to the fungus in areas where the fungus is common in the environment. People should avoid areas with accumulations of bird or bat droppings, especially if they have weakened immune systems. Areas with accumulations of bird or bat droppings should be cleaned up by professional companies that specialize in the removal of hazardous waste.

How can I get more information about histoplasmosis?

- If you have concerns about histoplasmosis, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at the [VDH Local Health Districts page](#).
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [the CDC page on histoplasmosis](#).

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