



Histoplasmosis

What is it?

Histoplasmosis is a yeast disease in humans caused by inhaling spores of a fungus (mould) called *Histoplasma capsulatum*. *H. capsulatum* grows in soil throughout the world. The mould seems to grow best in soil having high nitrogen content, especially enriched with bird, chicken or bat droppings.

What are the symptoms?

Histoplasmosis mainly affects a person's lungs, and its symptoms vary greatly. The majority of infected people have no symptoms or have symptoms so mild they do not seek medical attention and improve without any treatment or complications. Histoplasmosis can appear as a mild, flu-like respiratory illness with symptoms of malaise (a general ill feeling), fever, chest pain, dry or non-productive cough, headache, loss of appetite, shortness of breath and muscle pains.

Infants, as well as persons with weakened immune systems are at greatest risk of developing serious complications involving the liver, spleen, lymph nodes and bone marrow.

How soon do symptoms appear?

If symptoms do occur, they will usually start within three to 17 days after exposure, with an average of 10 days.

After an exposure, the degree of illness most likely depends on the concentration of mould inhaled as well as the person's age and susceptibility to the disease.

How is it spread?

Histoplasmosis is not contagious; it cannot be spread from person to person.

How can I protect myself?

The best way to prevent exposure to histoplasmosis is to avoid soil with high organic content and undisturbed bird droppings, such as in and around old chicken houses, bat caves, and starling, blackbird and pigeon roosts. This is especially important

for children under the age of two and those with weakened immune systems.

Reducing soil dust by carefully wetting areas of this nature with a water spray will reduce the risk of inhaling the spores. For cleaning of heavily contaminated areas, HEPA filter masks, gloves and coveralls are recommended.



For more information, please contact a member of Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit's Infectious Disease Team.

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