

Histoplasmosis Fact Sheet

1. **What is Histoplasmosis?** - Histoplasmosis is a disease caused by the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum*.
2. **Can anyone get Histoplasmosis?** - Yes. Studies have shown that between 50 and 80 percent of people living in areas where *H. capsulatum* fungus is common, such as the eastern and central United States have been exposed at some point in their lifetime. Infants, young children, and older persons, in particular those with chronic lung disease, are at increased risk for severe disease. Disseminated disease, where the organism spreads in the body, is more frequently seen in people with cancer or AIDS.
3. **Where is *H. capsulatum* found?** - *H. capsulatum* fungus is found throughout the world and is endemic in certain areas of the United States. *H. capsulatum* grows in soil and material contaminated with bat or bird droppings. The fungus has been found in poultry house litter, caves, areas harboring bats, and in bird roosts.
4. **How is someone infected with *H. capsulatum*?** – Fungus spores become airborne when contaminated materials are disturbed. Breathing the spores causes infection. The disease is not transmitted person to person or from animals to people
5. **What are the symptoms of Histoplasmosis?** - Most infected persons have no apparent ill effects. The acute respiratory disease is characterized by respiratory symptoms, a general ill feeling, fever, chest pains, and a dry or nonproductive cough. Distinct patterns may be seen on a chest x-ray. Chronic lung disease resembles tuberculosis and can worsen over months or years. The disseminated form is fatal unless treated.
6. **When do symptoms start?** - If symptoms occur, they will start within 3 to 17 days after exposure; the average is 10 days.
7. **Is Histoplasmosis treatable?** - Yes. Prescription antifungal medications are used to treat severe cases of acute disease and all cases of chronic and disseminated disease. Mild disease usually resolves within a month without treatment. Past infection results in partial protection if re-infected, and is likely to result in milder disease.
8. **What can be done to prevent Histoplasmosis?** - It is not practical to test or decontaminate most sites where *H. capsulatum* is found, but the following precautions can be taken to reduce a person's risk of exposure:
 - a. Avoid areas that may harbor the fungus, e.g., accumulations of bird or bat droppings.
 - b. Before starting a job or activity having a risk for exposure to *H. capsulatum*, seek out and comply with work practices and personal protective equipment guidance on the NIOSH/NCID homepage. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2005-109/pdfs/2005-109.pdf>

9. For more information about Histoplasmosis:

<http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/histoplasmosis/>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animal.