



## **HISTOPLASMOSIS FACT SHEET**

### **What is histoplasmosis?**

Histoplasmosis is a disease caused by inhaling the spores of the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum*. This fungus is common in Nebraska and can often be found in the soil in areas where bird and bat droppings are located. When the soil is disturbed by digging or raking, the fungal spores can become airborne. The disease usually involves the lungs, but may affect other areas of the body.

### **What are the symptoms of histoplasmosis?**

Most people who inhale the spores do not get sick, or they have symptoms that are very mild and resolve with no treatment. In people who do get sick, the most common symptoms include: fever, chest pains, and a dry or nonproductive cough. Other symptoms may include shortness of breath and malaise (feeling extremely tired). Rarely, more severe complications can develop. Distinct patterns may be seen on a chest x-ray.

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

If symptoms do start, they usually occur within 3-17 days after exposure. Many infections are overlooked; since they either have no symptoms or cause such a minor, brief respiratory illness that the person does not seek medical care. If you have questions regarding any of the above symptoms contact your healthcare provider.

### **How is histoplasmosis spread?**

The fungus is found in the soil and transmitted through the air. Transmission occurs when soil is disturbed, causing the fungus to become airborne. People then breathe in the fungus. Once inside a person's body the fungus can start growing and cause disease. The disease cannot be transmitted from one person to another.

### **Who gets histoplasmosis?**

Anyone can be infected. Immunocompromised patients (especially those on steroids, chemotherapy, or HIV meds) are at higher risk.

**Is histoplasmosis treatable?** - Yes. Antifungal medications are used to treat severe cases of acute disease and all cases of chronic and disseminated disease. Mild disease usually resolves without treatment. Past infection results in partial protection if re-infected, and is likely to result in milder disease.

### **Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?**

No, the disease cannot be transmitted from one person to another.

### **What can be done to help prevent the spread of this fungus?**

Workers cleaning up or disturbing soil at possibly contaminated sites should wear a mask and follow NIOSH guidelines. Before disturbing soil, spray the area with water or oil to minimize spread.

### **.For more information about Histoplasmosis:**

<http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/histoplasmosis>