



# HEALTH FOR LIFE

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## Histoplasmosis

### What Is Histoplasmosis?

It is an infection caused by a fungus called *Histoplasma capsulatum*. This fungus is found in bird or bat droppings in areas such as chicken coops, barns, caves or bridges. *Histoplasma capsulatum* is common around the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys.

### How Do You Get Histoplasmosis?

You can get Histoplasmosis by breathing in dust that has *Histoplasma Capsulatum*. This may happen during construction or work in areas with bird droppings. The fungus goes into your lungs where it can cause an infection. It can also spread around the body. Histoplasmosis is not spread from person to person, so you cannot get Histoplasmosis from a person who is infected.

### Who Can Get Histoplasmosis?

While Histoplasmosis can cause pneumonia, most people do not even know that they have it. However, someone with a weak immune system can get a serious infection. For example, a person with AIDS, cancer or a transplant can get very sick from Histoplasmosis.

### What Are The Warning Signs Of Histoplasmosis?

Histoplasmosis usually starts in the lungs. Signs of infection are cough, fever, feeling very tired and short of breath. If the infection spreads, people can lose weight and get sores on the skin or mouth. It is important to identify Histoplasmosis infection early to begin treatment. If you have AIDS, cancer or a transplant and have any of the warning signs, see your doctor.

### How Will Your Doctor Know If You Have Histoplasmosis?

Your doctor will need to ask you questions, examine you, get a chest x-ray, and blood and urine tests. Sometimes a sample must be taken from inside the bones or inside the lung to be sure that someone has Histoplasmosis.

## **Is There Treatment For Histoplasmosis?**

There are several medications that can treat Histoplasmosis. They often must be taken for months and if they are stopped too soon, then the infection can come back.

## **How Can I Protect Myself From Getting Histoplasmosis?**

- Avoid areas where there are lots of birds or bats, such as barns, coops and caves.
- If you own a bird as a pet, wear a mask and gloves when cleaning the cage.
- Eat a well-balanced diet, exercise regularly, and manage the stress in your life to help keep your immune system healthy.

If you have more questions about Histoplasmosis, please ask your doctor or nurse.

- ▶ Upon request all patient education handouts are available in other formats for people with hearing vision and language problems. Call 3-3191 for more information.