



## Hawaii State Department of Health

### Disease Investigation Branch

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## Histoplasmosis

### What is histoplasmosis?

Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by a fungus called *Histoplasma capsulatum*. The fungus can be found in soil contaminated by decaying animal and bird feces. This fungus produces spores, which if inhaled, can cause infection in the lungs. The infection can sometimes progress to involve other organs of the body.

### How do you get it?

You get histoplasmosis by inhaling the fungal spores that become airborne as dust particles when soil is disturbed. Outbreaks of histoplasmosis are reported most frequently in persons exposed to bird or bat feces, or contaminated soil found around chicken coops, bat caves, gardens, and in landscaped areas. Person-to-person spread of histoplasmosis does not occur.

### What are the symptoms of histoplasmosis?

Most people who become infected will have few or no symptoms. The symptoms can be mild or severe, ranging from a minor respiratory illness to a serious lung infection. The symptoms can include fever, chills, headache, cough, chest pain, muscle pain, and a general feeling of being ill. In severe cases, the fungus invades the liver, spleen, lymph nodes, and other organs of the body.

### When do symptoms start?

The symptoms commonly start 10 days following exposure to the fungus, but the onset can range from 5 to 18 days.

### What is the treatment for histoplasmosis?

No treatment is required for patients with mild histoplasmosis of the lungs. However, those patients with severe or progressive forms of the disease should see a doctor.

### If you get histoplasmosis once, can you get it again?

Yes, reinfection can occur, but the illness is usually milder.

### How do you keep from getting it?

Limit your exposure to dusty areas where there is likely to be animal and/or bird feces (such as chicken coops).

When working in dusty areas, wear a face mask and spray the area with water to decrease airborne dust that may contain spores.

For more information, see the CDC's website at

[http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease\\_listing/histoplasmosis\\_gi.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/dfbmd/disease_listing/histoplasmosis_gi.html)