

Histoplasmosis

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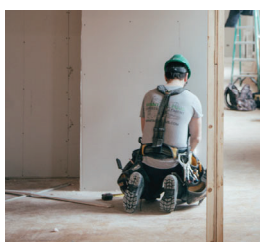
Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by inhaling fungus found in bird and bat droppings. When working around areas contaminated with bird and bat droppings, workers can be exposed to this fungi by disturbing the droppings. Once disturbed, tiny particles called “spores” may be released into the air. The spores can be inhaled and affect the worker’s lungs.

Workers may immediately show insignificant side effects, such as minor flu-like symptoms. Other symptoms may include muscle aches, dry cough, tightness in chest, and rashes. For some, especially those with weakened immune systems, the disease can be life-threatening because it can spread to other areas of the body, become severe, and eventually cause death.

Workers at Risk

Workers at potential risk include:

- Farmers and poultry keepers, especially when cleaning silos and chicken coops.
- Construction workers (particularly bridge workers and roofers) where they may be in contact with droppings or contaminated soil or involved in dismantling buildings or other structures where birds nest.
- Gardeners and groundskeepers using poultry manure as fertilizer.
- Pest control workers.
- Building maintenance workers and workers who service or repair heating and air conditioning systems.



Reduce the Risk

Preventing histoplasmosis is achieved when the following precautions are put in place to reduce the risk of infection:

- Always assume droppings are contaminated.
- If you have a weakened immune system, you should consult your doctor before working in a contaminated environment.
- If the building is not being demolished, eliminate the roost (nest) and seal entry points if possible.
- Avoid disturbing contaminated material to prevent dust and inhalation of spores.
- Never dry-sweep or dry-shovel material. Soak the material with water or a wetting agent to keep dust and spores from becoming airborne.
- Use a HEPA vacuum to clean up contaminated material.
- Dispose of the waste using 6 mm disposal bags.
- Wear the following personal protective equipment when removing large amounts of droppings
 - Rubber boots
 - Disposable gloves under work gloves
 - Disposable coveralls
 - Respiratory protection*



half-face



filtering facepiece (N-95 mask)



full-face mask

*Appropriate respirators range from an N95 filtering face piece for low-risk tasks to a full face piece air-purifying respirator or powered air-purifying respirator for high-risk tasks.

If you have questions on this or any workplace safety topic, contact WCB Occupational Health & Safety at 902-368-5697 or toll free 1-800-237-5049, or visit our website at wcb.pe.ca.