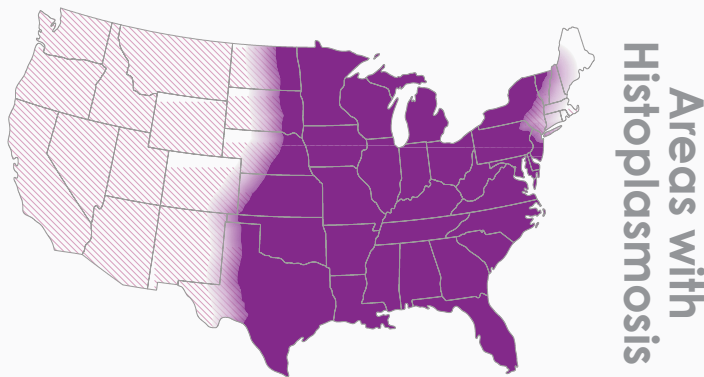


What Employers Need to Know about Histoplasmosis

What is histoplasmosis?

Histoplasmosis is an infection caused by a fungus called *Histoplasma capsulatum*. The fungus lives in the environment, particularly soil that contains large amounts of bird or bat droppings. People can get histoplasmosis after breathing in the microscopic fungal spores (also known as conidia) from the air. In the United States, *Histoplasma* mainly lives in the central and eastern states, particularly areas around the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys.



This map of the United States shows CDC’s current estimate of where the fungi that cause histoplasmosis lives in the environment. Darker shading shows areas where Histoplasma is more likely to live and diagonal shading shows the potential range of Histoplasma. These fungi are not distributed evenly in the shaded areas, might not be present everywhere in the shaded areas, and can also be outside of the shaded areas.

What are the symptoms of histoplasmosis?

Most people who breathe in the spores don’t get sick, but those who do may have a fever, cough, and fatigue. Symptoms usually appear between 3 and 17 days after a person breathes in the fungal spores. In some people, the infection can become severe and spread from the lungs to other parts of the body. This is more common in people with weakened immune systems or other medical conditions.

Some activities have risks for exposure to *Histoplasma*



Disturbance of large accumulations of bird or bat droppings (scraping droppings from a bridge, shoveling droppings from a building, cleaning a chicken coop)



Soil disruption (digging or excavation)



Plant matter disruption (handling trees, landscaping)



Demolition, construction, or renovation



Working in caves



In areas where *Histoplasma* is common, some people may have a higher chance of getting histoplasmosis. Examples include people who work in:

- Construction and demolition
- Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction
- Agriculture and forestry
- Any jobs that involve activities listed on page 1

How to prevent histoplasmosis in the workplace

The best way to prevent exposure to *Histoplasma* is to prevent the accumulation of bird or bat droppings in the first place. This can be accomplished by excluding bats and birds from buildings. If accumulation of bat or bird droppings must be removed, or if construction, excavation, or demolition must be done in areas where *Histoplasma* is common, employers should:

- Develop a site safety plan to minimize workplace exposures.
- Reduce or eliminate dust. Spray water or use other dust suppression techniques.
- Dispose of any material that might be contaminated with *Histoplasma* safely while following state and local requirements.
- Post health risk warnings in areas known or suspected to be contaminated with *Histoplasma*.
- Train workers so they understand the potential risks and how to protect themselves.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and associated training to workers.
- Encourage workers with workplace exposures to *Histoplasma* or symptoms of histoplasmosis to seek a medical evaluation with a healthcare provider.



Personal Protective Equipment can be used to protect workers from exposures to *Histoplasma*. Disposable protective clothing and shoe coverings can help prevent spreading spores to other places like a worker’s car or home.

For more information on histoplasmosis and how to protect your employees, please visit:

CDC’s histoplasmosis website: <https://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/histoplasmosis/>

CDC/NIOSH’s histoplasmosis website <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/histoplasmosis/>

Find NIOSH products and get answers to workplace safety and health questions:

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | TTY: 1-888-232-6348

CDC/NIOSH INFO: cdc.gov/info | cdc.gov/niosh

Monthly NIOSH eNews: cdc.gov/niosh/eNews

DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2022-103

DOI Number: <https://doi.org/10.26616/NIOSH PUB2022103>

December 2021

