

Histoplasmosis

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Histoplasmosis is a mycotic infection of man caused by *Histoplasma capsulatum* a soil saprophyte that produces infective spores. Human infection results about 10 days (3-17) after inhalation of airborne spores dislodged from soils enriched with animal feces. In about 80% of those infected, histoplasmosis takes either an subclinical or acute benign form that is characteristic of a flu-like syndrome (headache, myalgia, malaise, and cough) that resolves without specific treatment.¹ Progressive or chronic disseminated and chronic pulmonary (cavitary) forms of histoplasmosis have a poor prognosis and are difficult to diagnose and treat. Avian habitats associated with domestic poultry, pigeons, roosting flocks of wild birds and zoological parks are considered to be especially suitable for proliferation of *H. capsulatum*.¹ About 90% of all the cases reported in the US come from the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys and some portions of Virginia and Maryland.²

In Florida, histoplasmosis became a reportable disease in 1957. From that time through 1995, 110 human cases of histoplasmosis have been reported. However, less than one-third of the cases were acquired in the state and all of those were derived from exposure to caves inhabited by bats.³ The first documented case of histoplasmosis in the state associated with caves and bats occurred in 1955.⁴ Since then, reported cases have been sporadic and rare with a few cases reported in spelunkers in 1966 (1), 1972(3) and 1982(3).⁵ An unusual outbreak that involved 23 high school students attending a cave party in 1973, has also been documented⁶ Epidemiological studies have demonstrated that *H. capsulatum* can be recovered from the soil and bats (*Myotis austroriparius* and *Pipistrellus subflavus*) associated with the caves frequented by these cases.^{3,6,7}

References

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