



Blastomycosis

Frequently Asked Questions

What is blastomycosis?

Blastomycosis is an uncommon but potentially severe illness caused by the fungus *Blastomyces*. Anyone can get blastomycosis if they've been in an area where *Blastomyces* lives in the environment.

People with certain medical conditions or who are taking certain medications that weaken the immune system may be more likely to develop severe blastomycosis than people who are otherwise healthy (e.g., diabetes, kidney failure, HIV infection, autoimmune diseases, pregnancy, cancer, transplant receipts, immune deficiency, and those taking chemotherapy, corticosteroids, or other medications to suppress immune responses).

Where is *Blastomyces* found?

The fungus lives in the environment, particularly in moist soil. It is commonly found along the banks of waterways and in decomposing organic matter such as wood and leaves.

Blastomyces lives throughout the Midwest, especially around the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys, the Great Lakes and the Saint Lawrence River. In states where blastomycosis is reportable, there are about 1–2 cases per 100,000 people per year. However, yearly rates are reported to be as high as 40 cases per 100,000 people in some northern Wisconsin counties.

Historically, rates of blastomycosis have been higher in the Upper Peninsula than in other parts of Michigan.

How is blastomycosis spread?

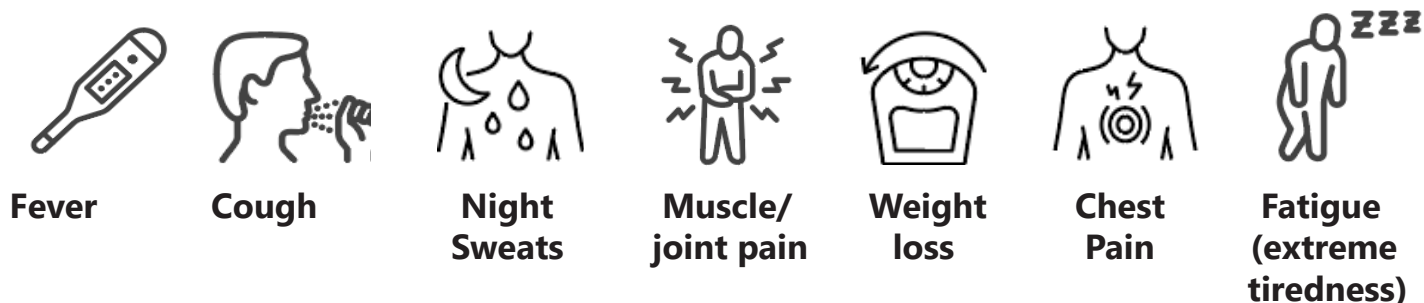
People can get blastomycosis after breathing in the microscopic fungal spores from the air, often after participating in activities that disturb the soil. In rare cases, the fungus can also enter through cuts in the skin.

Blastomycosis cannot be spread between people or between people and animals through the air.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Signs and symptoms of blastomycosis usually appear between 3 weeks and 3 months after a person breathes in the fungal spores. Approximately half of people who are infected with the fungus *Blastomyces* will show signs or symptoms.

The signs and symptoms of blastomycosis are often like signs and symptoms of other lung infections, and can include:



People can also develop skin lesions that look like ulcers, warts, or raised pus-filled lesions and may vary from gray to violet in color.

What should I do if I have signs or symptoms?

- **See a healthcare provider** if you develop any of the signs or symptoms listed above. Let your healthcare provider know if you have been in an area with reported blastomycosis cases.
- **Make sure you get the right treatment.** People are usually treated with prescription antifungal medicine for several months. Antibiotics are not used to treat blastomycosis.

Can I prevent blastomycosis?

It may not be possible to completely avoid being exposed to the fungus that causes blastomycosis in areas where it is common in the environment. The following actions can help:

- **Monitor any signs or symptoms** of blastomycosis and talk to your healthcare provider if you begin to experience symptoms.
- **Wear personal protective equipment** such as an N95 respirator when doing activities that may disrupt soil or create dust.

There is no vaccine to prevent blastomycosis.

Find more information on blastomycosis at the CDC website:
www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/blastomycosis/index.html