

Health Advisory: Increase in Blastomycosis Cases

Minnesota Department of Health Thu Sep 05 10:00 CDT 2019

Action Steps

Local and tribal health departments: Please forward to hospitals, clinics, emergency departments, urgent care centers and convenience clinics in your jurisdiction

Hospitals and clinics: Please distribute to health care providers in these facilities, particularly those who may see patients with pneumonia

Healthcare providers:

- Test the following patients for blastomycosis: those with severe pneumonia, pneumonia not responding to antibiotics, or pneumonia and immunocompromised status.
- Order cytology with fungal stains and fungal culture on sputum or other samples, and Blastomyces antigen testing of serum or urine.
- Ask patients about travel and outdoor activities, particularly to northeastern Minnesota.
- Report cases to MDH at 1-877-676-5414 (toll-free) or 651-201-5414.

Background

Higher than expected numbers of blastomycosis cases are being reported in 2019 in Minnesota, likely due to favorable environmental conditions. Also, veterinarians are reporting more cases in animals than expected; animals may serve as sentinels for human cases.

There are no known practical measures for the prevention of blastomycosis. Minimizing morbidity and mortality from the disease depends primarily on early recognition and appropriate treatment. Diagnosis is often delayed. In 2018, the case fatality rate was 14%.

Blastomycosis is caused by *Blastomyces* fungal species, found primarily in soil along waterways of the midwest and central United States. Northeastern Minnesota is highly endemic. However, not all blastomycosis cases report travel to or outdoor activities in this area. Lack of exposure does not rule out fungal infection, but exposures may be a diagnostic guide. Blastomycosis is a reportable disease in Minnesota, in both people and animals.

Clinical Presentation and Evaluation

Transmission occurs through inhalation of aerosolized fungal spores from contaminated soil. The median incubation period is 45 days (range, 21 to 106 days). Common clinical presentations include acute pulmonary symptoms ranging from mild to fulminant. Infections may disseminate to skin, bones and the central nervous system. The most common symptoms of blastomycosis include cough, fever, chills, weight loss, night sweats and chest, joint or back pain.

For more information, please call Dr. Malia Ireland at 651-201-5414 or see the blastomycosis page and video for providers on the MDH website at:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/blastomycosis/hcp.html>

A copy of this HAN is available at <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ep/han/index.html>

The content of this message is intended for public health and health care personnel and response partners who have a need to know the information to perform their duties.