

Fact Sheet: Fungal Meningitis

What is Fungal Meningitis?

Fungal meningitis is an inflammation of the membranes that cover the brain and spinal cord that is caused by a fungal infection. Fungal meningitis is rare and usually affects those with weak immune systems. There are several types of fungi that can cause fungal meningitis, including *Cryptococcus*, *Histoplasma*, *Blastomyces*, and *Coccidioides*.

Signs and Symptoms

Meningitis infection is characterized by:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck.

It is often accompanied by other symptoms such as:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Photophobia (sensitivity to light)
- Altered mental status

Symptoms may appear 3 to 4 days after exposure and are sudden in onset; however, some people can be infected and have no symptoms at all.

How is it spread?

Fungal meningitis is not contagious, so it cannot be spread from person-to-person. The fungus is only spread when it travels through the blood to the central nervous system (CNS) from being introduced directly into the CNS or from some other infection site close to the CNS. Fungal meningitis may also result after taking medications that weaken the immune system, such as steroids or medications after organ transplant. Recently, Michigan (among other states) experienced a fungal meningitis outbreak caused by contaminated steroid injections.

Treatment

Fungal meningitis treatment involves long course, high dose, anti-fungal medications given through an IV in the hospital. Actual length of treatment depends on the status of the immune system and what type of fungus is causing the infection. Immunocompromised individuals usually experience even longer treatment regimens.

Prevention

No specific activities increase the risk for fungal meningitis; however, because most of the causal fungi dwell in soil areas, digging and any activities that involve dust should be avoided.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/DiseasesConditions/>
Ingham County Health Department 5303 S. Cedar St. Lansing, MI 48911

Updated: May 2016