

BLASTOMYCOSIS

(North American Blastomycosis; Gilchrist's Disease)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An infectious, fungus disease that starts in the lungs. Occasionally it spreads through the bloodstream to other body parts especially the skin. Blastomycosis is not contagious from person to person, but can be transmitted through bites from infected dogs. It can involve the lungs; mouth; skin and tissue below the skin; prostate; and epididymis. Higher prevalence of blastomycosis is found in states bordering the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms may begin slowly or infection may be abrupt.
- Cough, either dry and non-productive or with sputum.
- Chest pain.
- Chills, fever and drenching sweats.
- Shortness of breath.
- Fatigue, loss of appetite.
- If skin involved, may have lesions or abscesses.

CAUSES

Infection with the fungus, *Blastomyces dermatitidis*, found in wood and soil. There may be some association with beaver huts. Skin lesions occur most commonly in gardeners or farmers, but the natural source of this fungus is unknown.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Gardening and farming, especially in Southeastern states and the Mississippi River valley of the U.S.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Use of immunosuppressive drugs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This fungus can cause severe, debilitating illness that may be fatal without treatment. With intensive treatment, it is usually curable in several weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Spread to other body parts, with serious illness and death. If the infection spreads, the following may appear:

- Pain in long bones.
- Skin lesions that begin as small papules (small, raised bumps on the skin) or pustules (small white blisters with pus) on exposed skin surfaces. They spread slowly. When fully developed, the lesions become crusted ulcers with sloping, reddish-purple borders.
- Swelling and painful tender nodules in the scrotum.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include culture of skin lesions, pus, sputum or pulmonary secretions; biopsy of tissue from the skin or lungs; chest X-ray and other laboratory studies.
- Treatment is with medication and other supportive care as needed.
- Usually hospitalized to initiate treatment.
- Heat may be helpful for joint pain.
- Weigh daily and keep a weight chart. An unexplained weight loss might indicate the infection has spread.
- Keep follow-up appointments with the doctor. It is important to monitor the effectiveness of the treatment and watch for side effects or adverse reactions from the medications.

MEDICATIONS

Antifungal drugs are drugs of choice.

ACTIVITY

Rest in bed during the acute stage. Resume activities gradually as your strength returns.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of blastomycosis.
- Any of the following occur during treatment:
 - Weight loss.
 - Fever.
 - Diarrhea that cannot be controlled with home remedies.
 - Severe headache and stiff neck.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.