

Blastomycosis

What is it?

- A lung infection caused by a fungus that lives in moist soil and in decaying wood and leaves.
- The fungus is often found in forested areas and along shorelines, such as near lakes and rivers.
- People can become infected by breathing in the fungus when soil, wood or leaves are disturbed.
- Blastomycosis cannot be spread from person to person.
- **You may not be able to avoid exposure to the fungus that causes blastomycosis, but early diagnosis and treatment can help prevent serious illness.**

How can you be exposed?

You may be exposed to the fungus during outdoor activities that disturb soil, wood or leaves including:

- Yard work such as gardening, planting, digging, handling mulch and landscaping
- Chopping, moving or handling firewood
- Hunting, trapping, fishing or gathering wild plants
- Hiking, biking or using all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in wooded areas
- Construction and excavation work

The risk of exposure may be higher after heavy rain, flooding or strong winds, which can disturb soil and release the fungus into the air.

What are the most common symptoms?

Not everyone exposed to the fungus develops symptoms. Those who do, usually develop symptoms within three weeks to three months after exposure. The most common symptoms of blastomycosis are:

- Fever or chills
- New or worsening cough
- Night sweats
- Muscle and joint aches
- Feeling very tired or generally unwell

Some people may develop more serious symptoms, including:

- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- A cough that does not go away

In some cases, blastomycosis can spread beyond the lungs and affect other parts of the body, such as the skin, bones, or brain.

People at higher risk of getting very sick

- Elders and older adults, people with weakened immune systems, people who are pregnant, and people with chronic lung disease may be at higher risk of becoming very sick from blastomycosis.

When should you seek medical care?

- See a health care provider if you have symptoms after taking part in outdoor activities in the last 3 weeks to 3 months that may disturb soil, wood or leaves, especially if your symptoms do not go away or if you feel worse over time instead of better:
- If you seek medical care, tell your health care provider: **"I may have been exposed to the fungus that causes blastomycosis."**
- Your health care provider can determine whether you need testing for blastomycosis.

How can you protect yourself?

- Try to reduce breathing in dust when taking part in outdoor activities that disturb soil, wood and leaves.
- If you are at higher risk of getting very sick, consider getting help with activities that disturb soil, wood, or leaves when possible.

What we still do not know?

- We don't know exactly where the fungus is present in the environment or why some people become very sick while others do not.

For more information, visit:

Public Health Ontario's Blastomycosis website: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Diseases-and-Conditions/Infectious-Diseases/Respiratory-Diseases/Blastomycosis>

The information in this document is current as of August 2026.

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