



Manitoba Association of Cottage Owners

Health and Safety

Blastomycosis and Fungal Infections

Updated: September 11, 2015

Issue: Public Health Risk – Blastomycosis and Other Fungal Infections

Background to the Issue:

- Blastomycosis is an uncommon infection caused by the *Blastomyces dermatitidis* fungus found in the soil. The infection affects the lungs and skin.
- It can cause persistent skin infection and pneumonia that is hard to treat.
- Other fungal species may be found in rotting vegetation, rotting wood of trees, stagnant water, bat caves, etc..

Cautionary Notes:

- The fungus may be found in moist acid soils. This type of soil is frequently found in Manitoba- Ontario border areas.
- It is not contagious from a person or animal. Digging, construction, gardening may cause the fungus spores to be carried into the air and inhaled. Spores may also cause infection by getting it on a sore or cut.
- Testing soil for the fungus is difficult and unreliable.
- There is no vaccine available.
- Symptoms are similar to other illnesses and can be confusing for the medical practitioner. Without treatment blastomycosis can become a serious illness.
- A very common source of some of these agents is the damp crawl space under cottages.
- Blastomycosis can be a very debilitating disease, with persistent skin ulcers and/or chronic progressive pneumonia.
- There are treatments available after a diagnosis is confirmed, but the recovery period can take up to five (5) years.

Policy or Program Implications:

- Wearing protective clothing and disposable filter dusk masks which may help to reduce exposure to spores in hazardous environments.
- Those with a weakened immune system should avoid contact with soil in risky areas.

Action Taken by MACO:

- At the MACO 2005 Annual General Meeting Dr. Michael Routledge provided information on blastomycosis and precautions to take. His presentation is available as well. Dr. Routledge also provided a website for further information.
- Information on other types of fungal infections is available – google would be one source.
- An article on Cryptococcosis is available in the Scientific American magazine, dated December, 2013; page 52.

MACO's Recommendations for the Future:

- Visit this public health website re Blastomycosis
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/factsheets/blastomycosis.pdf>
- MediaBulletin - Office of Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, Province of Manitoba of May 15, 2009; <http://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html?archive=2009-5-01&item=5884>
- For more information you may contact your doctor, your local Public Health Unit or Health Links-Info Sante at 1-888-315-9257 or 204-788-8200.
- If you experience symptoms, see the doctor and advise the area where you have been.

Position of MACO:

- Be aware and take precautions when possible.
- Follow recommendations of health officials.
- Be aware that pets, especially dogs, can contract Blastomycosis or other fungal infections from digging in soil.
- A persistent skin infection in a pet that is resistant to treatment should be suspect for fungal infection and the animal should be seen by a veterinarian.