

Aspergillosis

What is Aspergillosis?

Aspergillosis is an infection or allergic reaction caused by a common mold (a type of fungus) found in the soil, decaying plant matter (such as compost piles or fallen leaves), household dust, building materials and ornamental plants, food, and water.

Most people breathe in fungal spores every day. It is not harmful to healthy people but can cause infection in people who have certain risks.

Who is at Risk for Infection?

People with weakened immune systems or lung disease are at risk, including people who have:

- asthma, cystic fibrosis or other chronic (long-lasting) lung diseases (may develop an allergic lung reaction)
- weakened immune system due to lowered white blood cell, such as cancer, leukemia, stem cell or organ transplant and medicines such as corticosteroids.

How is Aspergillosis Spread?

- The disease spreads through the air by fungal spores that are inhaled.
- It can also be caused by breathing in droplets of contaminated water, such as from a shower head.
- It is not spread person to person.

What are the Symptoms of Aspergillosis?

Symptoms of an aspergillosis allergic reaction include:

- wheezing
- shortness of breath
- cough
- fever (in rare cases)
- stuffiness
- runny nose
- headache
- reduced ability to smell.

Depending on which area of your body is affected, symptoms of an aspergillosis infection may include:

- cough
- coughing up blood
- shortness of breath
- weight loss
- fatigue (feeling really tired)
- fever.

Other symptoms (such as chest pain or joint pain) may occur if the infection spreads from your lungs to other parts of your body.

If you have any of the above symptoms and have had exposure to mold either outdoors or inside, call your health care provider.

How is Aspergillosis Found?

Your health care provider will review your medical history, risks and symptoms.

They may want you to have chest X-rays or CT scan of your lungs, blood tests, biopsies and skin tests to confirm that you have aspergillosis.

If lung infection is suspected, your health care provider may want to collect a sample of fluid from your respiratory tract for lab testing.

How is Aspergillosis Treated?

Your health care provider will treat your symptoms depending on how severe they are. You may need antifungal medicine, steroids or both.

You may need surgery if your infection is severe.

How Can You Prevent Aspergillosis?

- For outdoors:
 - Avoid areas with a lot of dust and likely heavy contamination from spores (such as a construction site). If you can't avoid it, wear an N95 respirator (face mask).
 - Avoid activities that involve close contact to soil or dust, such as yard work or gardening. If you can't avoid it, wear gloves, shoes, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt.
 - If you get a scratch or cut, clean skin injuries well with soap and water, especially if your skin came into contact with soil or dust.
- For indoors:
 - Find areas that may have moisture such as basements or around doors and windows and around drains. Keep surfaces as dry as possible.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.