



State of Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

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State and Local Health Officials Continue to Investigate Fungal Infection in Northeastern Wisconsin

Blastomycosis occurs from inhaling fungal spores, cannot be transmitted from person to person, and is treatable with proper medication

MADISON – State and local health officials have confirmed 4 blastomycosis cases among individuals who went tubing on the Little Wolf River in early June.

“Blastomycosis is treatable with anti-fungal medication, so individuals with continual, persistent pneumonia-like symptoms are encouraged to contact their physicians to help ensure early detection and treatment of the fungus,” said James Kazmierczak, State Public Health Veterinarian. He noted that because the time between a person’s exposure and when they first become sick is quite variable, it is possible that additional cases may be recognized.

Onset of illness can occur between 3 and 15 weeks after exposure. Symptoms typically include a fever, cough, muscle aches and fatigue which may progress to weight loss, chest pain and a persistent cough. If not detected and treated early, blastomycosis can cause serious health complications. About half of individuals exposed to the fungus never develop symptoms. Health officials stress that blastomycosis is not spread from person to person and can be treated with the proper medications.

Blastomycosis develops when inhaled spores of *Blastomyces dermatitidis*, a type of fungus found in soil, cause an infection in the lung. The spores are released and become airborne when the soil or rotting organic matter is disturbed. The fungus grows and produces infecting spores only under very specific weather and soil conditions, so a “hot” spot for spores may pose no risk within a day or two. There is currently no way to identify areas where the organism exists. The conditions that existed on the Little Wolf River in June, when the individuals making up the current cluster of cases went tubing there, have long since changed. Testing for the fungus in soil or water is usually not successful.

In Wisconsin, a total of 91 cases were reported in 2013 and 89 cases in 2014. Sixty-one percent of those cases were hospitalized. Most occurred in northern Wisconsin counties due to environmental conditions more favorable to the fungus.

Learn more about blastomycosis from [DHS](#) and the [CDC](#).

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