



# BLASTOMYCOSIS

(North American Blastomycosis; Gilchrist's Disease)



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

An infectious fungal disease that starts in the lungs. It can occasionally spread through the bloodstream to other body parts, especially the skin. Blastomycosis is not spread from person to person, but can be spread through bites from infected dogs. It can involve the lungs, mouth, skin (and tissue below the skin), and the prostate. Higher rates of the disease are found in states bordering the Mississippi and Ohio rivers.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms may begin slowly or infection may be sudden.
- Cough, either wet or dry.
- Chest pain.
- Chills, fever, and sweats.
- Shortness of breath.
- Fatigue, loss of appetite.
- May have bumps or sores on the skin.

### CAUSES

Infection with a fungus found in wood and soil. Skin lesions occur most commonly in gardeners or farmers, but the natural source of this fungus is not known.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Gardening and farming, especially in southeastern states and the Mississippi River valley of the United States.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- Use of drugs that suppress the immune system.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This fungus can cause severe illness that may be fatal without treatment. With 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, raised bumps or small, white blisters with pus. They spread slowly. When fully developed, the lesions become open sores with sloping, reddish-purple borders.
- Swelling and painful, tender lumps in the scrotum.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask questions about your symptoms. Medical tests may include blood tests; culture of the skin lesions, pus, saliva, or lung secretions; X-ray, and biopsy. Biopsy is where a small amount of tissue is removed and examined with a microscope.
- Treatment is with drugs and other supportive care.
- A hospital stay is usually needed at start of treatment.
- Heat may be helpful for joint pain.
- Weigh yourself daily and keep a weight chart. An unexplained weight loss might indicate that the infection has spread.
- Keep follow-up appointments with your health care provider. It is important to monitor the treatment and watch for side effects or reactions from the medications.

### MEDICATIONS

Drugs will be prescribed to kill the underlying fungus.

### ACTIVITY

Rest in bed during the worst stage. Resume activities slowly 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.

