

## What is cryptococcal disease?

Cryptococcal disease is an infection caused by an unusual type of fungus, *Cryptococcus*. There are three main types of *Cryptococcus* that cause disease: *C. gattii*, *C. grubii*, and *C. neoformans*. Whereas *C. neoformans* and *C. grubii* cause illness predominantly in people with impaired immune systems, *C. gattii* can cause illness in otherwise healthy people as well as those with impaired immunity. Although infection is rare, several Washington residents were recently infected by *C. gattii*. The fungus can affect a person's lungs (pneumonia) or nervous system (meningitis). In rare cases, the infection can be fatal. Animals, including pets, also can develop cryptococcal disease.

## Where is this fungus found?

*C. gattii* lives on trees and in the soil.

## Does *Cryptococcus gattii* occur in Washington?

*C. gattii* has been found in the environment in Washington. Washington State Department of Health has also had reports of animals and humans who have acquired the infection in the state.

## How are people exposed?

The infection is caused by breathing in the *Cryptococcus* fungus.

## What are the symptoms of cryptococcal disease?

Symptoms of cryptococcal disease include:

- Prolonged cough (lasting weeks or months)
- Sharp chest pain
- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Severe headache
- Fever
- Night sweats
- Unintended weight loss

Please see a health care provider if you experience these symptoms.

## How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms appear many two to twelve months after exposure to the fungus.

## What is the treatment?

Cryptococcal disease can be treated with antifungal medication prescribed by a health care provider.

## **Can I get cryptococcal disease from another person or animal?**

Cryptococcal disease can not be passed from person to person or from animal to person. A person with cryptococcal disease is not contagious.

## **How do I prevent getting cryptococcal disease?**

There are no particular precautions to prevent cryptococcal disease. The benefits of outdoors recreation and activities far outweigh the risks of acquiring cryptococcal disease. Remember that this is a very rare disease, but if you experience the symptoms listed above, see a health care provider.

## **Where can I get more information?**

Call your [local health department](#) or the Washington State Department of Health

- For questions about human health: Communicable Disease Epidemiology Section (206) 418-5500, or toll free (877) 539-4344
- For questions about animal health: Zoonotic Disease program (360) 236-3885.