

Medical guidance notes and information

Pigeon droppings

Pigeon droppings are unhygienic. Two diseases, Histoplasmosis and Cryptococcosis are caused by fungi that grow in pigeon, other bird and bat droppings.

Histoplasmosis

Histoplasmosis is a disease caused by a fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum* which grows in pigeon, other bird and bat droppings. The disease is transmitted to humans by airborne fungus spores from soil contaminated by droppings. Infection occurs when the spores carried in the air are inhaled especially if a roost is disturbed. Both humans and animals can be affected, but the disease can not be transmitted from person to person. Those with compromised immune systems such as cancer patients or people living with HIV/AIDS are generally more at risk of developing histoplasmosis.

Most infections are mild and produce no symptoms. If symptoms are experienced, they usually appear about 10 days after initial infection and include influenza like symptoms. On occasion the disease can cause high fever, blood abnormalities, pneumonia and even death if left untreated.

A potentially eye blinding condition Ocular Histoplasmosis Syndrome may be caused by the fungus and 4% of those exposed to the disease are at risk of developing the syndrome.

If influenza like symptoms do develop in the days or weeks following contact with pigeon or bat droppings, and the illness worsens rather than subsides after a few days, medical care should be sought and the health care provider should be informed about the potential exposure.

Cryptococcosis

Cryptococcosis infection is transmitted to humans the same way as Histoplasmosis. Generally cryptococcosis infections occur without symptoms and are mild. Those with compromised immune systems such as cancer patients or people living with HIV/AIDS are generally more at risk of developing Cryptococcosis.

The usual first sign of Cryptococcosis is a lung infection. Infection then spreads to central nervous system and is fatal if not treated. Cryptococcosis can also affect the skin causing an infection where acne like skin eruptions or ulcers with nodules under the skin occurs, although this form is quite rare.

It is very unlikely that healthy people will become infected with Cryptococcosis even at high levels of exposure, however if symptoms are experienced after exposure to pigeon, other bird or bat droppings, medical attention should be sought and the health care provider should be informed about the potential exposure.

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Removal of bird and bat droppings

Consult your SQE Adviser for advice if there is a large quantity of droppings to remove. Precautions would need to be followed by the workers to minimize the risk of catching Histoplasmosis or Cryptococcosis.

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