Histoplasmosis Fact Sheet

What is histoplasmosis?
Histoplasmosis is a disease caused by the fungus *Histoplasma capsulatum*. Infection has been described in humans and many animal species. Dogs and cats are the animals most commonly diagnosed with the disease.

Where is *Histoplasma capsulatum* found?
*Histoplasma capsulatum* is found in the environment worldwide and is most common in North and Central America. In the United States, it is commonly found in the Mississippi and Ohio River Valleys. Occasional cases can be identified in Minnesota. It is found in soils and areas with accumulations of bird or bat droppings.

How is histoplasmosis transmitted?
The microscopic fungal spores grow in soils and materials contaminated with bird or bat droppings. If the soil or droppings are disturbed, the spores can become airborne and be breathed into the lungs. Histoplasmosis cannot be transmitted from person to person or from animals to people. It is caused by a direct exposure to airborne fungal organism.

What are the symptoms of histoplasmosis in humans?
Many people who are infected with the fungus do not show any symptoms. In people that develop histoplasmosis, the symptoms are similar to pneumonia and may include fever, chest pain, and a dry cough. The infection can sometimes become serious if it is not treated, especially if the infection spreads from the lungs to other parts of the body.

What are the signs of histoplasmosis in animals?
The clinical signs of histoplasmosis in animals vary and may include emaciation, chronic cough, difficulty breathing, persistent diarrhea, fever, anemia, and enlarged lymph nodes, liver, and/or spleen. Most infections in animals, however, are subclinical (no clinical signs).

When do the symptoms appear?
In humans who develop histoplasmosis, the symptoms typically occur within 3 to 17 days after exposure to the fungus.

How is histoplasmosis diagnosed?
Blood test may give an indication of infection. Your veterinarian may perform chest radiographs looking for evidence of pneumonia. To verify the diagnosis, your veterinarian may also elect to perform more definitive tests such as cytology and culture.

What is the treatment for histoplasmosis?
The treatment for dogs and cats is an oral antifungal (typically Itraconazole or Ketoconazole) for 4 to 6 months.

How can histoplasmosis be prevented?
It is important to have an awareness of the risk in endemic areas or when traveling to endemic areas. Histoplasmosis can be prevented by avoiding areas with accumulations of bird and bat droppings. This is especially important for young children, older people, those with chronic lung disease, and those with weakened immune systems.

Resources:

CDC:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

*This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 2014.*