

# BLASTOMYCOSIS: Employers and Workers

Blastomycosis is an uncommon illness caused by a fungus. This fungus is so small it cannot be seen by the human eye. About half of people with Blastomycosis will not feel sick. People with a weakened immune system or a chronic illness are more likely to get sick.

## How is it spread?

- Blastomycosis is spread through some types of soil or dirt. When dirt is moved, fungus can get into the air. You then may breathe in fungus from the air. The fungus can also enter through cuts in your skin, but it is not as common.
- The fungus grows in rich, moist soil that wasn't moved for a long time, especially along the banks of waterways near pine trees.
- Blastomycosis cannot be spread person-to-person.



**Blastomycosis is rare but can be a serious illness for those who get it:**

1 out of 10 Wisconsinites with Blastomycosis dies every year.

## What types of workers might be at risk?

In areas where the fungus is common, jobs that involve digging or moving soil have a higher risk of blastomycosis. Examples include people who work in:

- Soil disruption (digging or excavation).
- Plant matter disruption (handling trees, landscaping).
- Outdoor demolition, construction, or renovation.
- Placement and maintenance of wells, septic systems, or utility lines.
- Activities along waterways (dam or dock maintenance, harvesting aquatic life, surveying).



## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms will not show up right away. You may start feeling sick 3-15 weeks after breathing in the fungus.



Fever or chills



Cough



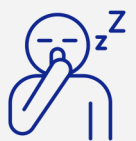
Shortness of breath



Chest or back pain



Skin sores that look crusted or get bigger



Feeling very tired

# What should you do if you have symptoms?

- **See a doctor or nurse** if your symptoms do not get better or become worse.
- **Bring this fact sheet and explain that you are at risk of blastomycosis.** Since blastomycosis is rare and many of the symptoms are common, doctors and nurses may not test for it unless they know you are at risk.
- **Make sure you get the right treatment.** People are usually treated with antifungal medicine for several months.

## How can I prevent getting blastomycosis while working?

There is no test to see if the fungus that causes blastomycosis is in the soil before work begins. If work must be done in moist areas where the fungus is more common, take these steps:

- Do not dig or move soil on windy days.
- Use a cover to store soil and yard materials.
- Move yard litter only when dry.
- Make sure there is water drainage near work areas.
- Install walkways (e.g., launches, docks, clearings) when working close to water. Then you will not move the soil when you walk.
- Wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and know the symptoms of blastomycosis.



**Those with a weakened immune system or lung problems:**

Avoid working in outdoor areas where the fungus grows or wear PPE.



## What PPE can help protect me?

- **Facemask or respirator:** A facemask will help, and a high-quality respirator (N95, N99) provides the most protection.
- **Eye protection.**
- **Gloves** to protect your hands from scratches.
- **Clothes and shoes that can be taken off at the worksite** (e.g., disposable or washable coveralls, boots, hat, helmet).

For more information visit:

[dhs.wi.gov/disease/blastomycosis.htm](https://dhs.wi.gov/disease/blastomycosis.htm)



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