

Assessing Your Risk of Getting a Fungal Infection

1. Where do you live and travel?

Fungi that can cause serious infections are more common in some parts of the United States and world. Living in Louisiana and traveling to neighboring states may put you at an increased risk for infection with certain fungal diseases

- For example, the fungus that causes Valley fever (also called coccidioidomycosis) is found mainly in the southwestern United States. Louisianans traveling to arid parts of Texas may be exposed to this pathogen.
- Histoplasmosis and Blastomycosis are endemic to Louisiana, which means that we are at a higher risk compared to other states. These infections usually cause a lung infection that is often mistaken for flu or a bacterial infection.

2. What types of activities are you doing?

Harmful fungi can be found in air, dust, and soil. Histoplasma grows especially well in soil that contains bird or bat droppings. Activities like digging, gardening, cleaning chicken coops, and visiting caves can result in you breathing in fungi that may cause infection.

3. Do you have an immunocompromising condition or are taking medications that affect your immune system?

- Medications used to treat conditions like rheumatoid arthritis or lupus may weaken your immune system and increase the chance of getting a fungal infection.
- Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy and radiation, weakens your immune system and may increase the chance you will get a fungal infection.
- People living with HIV/AIDS may be more likely to get fungal infections. Two well-known fungal infections associated with HIV/AIDS in the United States are oral candidiasis (thrush) and Pneumocystis pneumonia. Worldwide, cryptococcal meningitis is a major cause of illness in people living with HIV/AIDS.

4. Will you be hospitalized or have you recently had a transplant?

- One of the most common bloodstream infections in hospitalized patients is caused by a fungus called *Candida*. *Candida* normally lives in the gastrointestinal tract and on skin without causing any problems, but it can enter the bloodstream during a hospital stay and cause infection.
- People who have recently had an organ transplant or a stem cell transplant have a greater chance of developing a fungal infection while their immune systems are weakened. Doctors prescribe antifungal medication for some transplant patients to prevent fungal infections from developing.

5. Do you have symptoms of pneumonia that are not getting better with antibiotics?

- Fungal infections, especially lung infections like Valley fever, Histoplasmosis, and Aspergillosis, can have similar symptoms as bacterial infections. However, ***antibiotics do not work for fungal infections***. Early testing for fungal infections reduces unnecessary antibiotic use and allows people to start treatment with antifungal medication, if necessary.