

Bat Guano In Attics And Crawlspace

Information provided by the Louisiana Office of Public Health

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The presence of bat guano in an attic or crawlspace can cause a serious health risk for homeowners or occupants of other types of buildings. The problem begins when dried bat guano is disturbed and "bat guano dust" is created in an attic. When these microscopic spores from the dried bat guano are inhaled by humans they can cause a serious respiratory disease called histoplasmosis*.

Sometimes, we disturb the dirt (cleaning up the garden, sweeping out the empty building, or doing other seemingly harmless dirty work), causing the spores to become airborne. When we breathe that air, we then become infected with the histoplasmosis fungus and the real trouble begins.

PRECAUTIONS:

- Spray a mist of water over contaminated sites if you have to work there. This will help to keep down the dust (and any spores in the dust).
- If you must work around a contaminated area, wear disposable clothing and specially designed face masks that can filter particulate matter of 1 milli-micron (1 mμ) in diameter.
- Keep bats and birds from nesting in areas in buildings such as barns, and in your house attic, crawlspace or eaves.
- Note that you may have to have your home or building cleared of bats and/or bird roosts. If that is the case, it is best to have a company specializing in bat control do this. They will know the proper ways to control the spores and have appropriate clothing and equipment to minimize the risk of getting or spreading the disease.

* For more on histoplasmosis visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (<http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/histoplasmosis/index.html>).

I have scattered droppings in my attic. Is it safe to vacuum them up?

Scattered bat droppings (guano) do not pose a risk and can be safely swept up or vacuumed. Of course - the dust often found in attics may be an irritant, and you might be wise to wear a dust mask - there is very little risk of histoplasmosis. It is when the guano starts to accumulate and pile up that the fungus that causes histoplasmosis can grow and develop spores.

When bat control professionals clean up these droppings, they use industrial vacuums with special high-efficiency filters that reduce the risk to the worker. Even then, the experts don protective clothing and air masks to avoid breathing the spores.

I have a pile of bat droppings in the corner of my attic that is 8 inches deep. Is it okay to be in the house?

Generally, there is no problem if the droppings are not disturbed, or if the air vents do not pull up air from that area. However, you should have an expert determine your risk factors in this case.

I had bats living in my wall. Now I have a smell. Is it safe to breathe the air?

While breathing the air may not be pleasant, you should not have problems associated with histoplasmosis. However, be aware that bats may carry bat mites, fleas, and other insects, and they are likely to find a way into your living area. Also, if a bat is trapped, it may die, and the smell of the decomposing bat, as well as the guano, may be very unpleasant. It is best to have the bats removed as quickly as possible.

Before you handle bat droppings, put on a mask to cover your nose and mouth and use disposable gloves. It is best to use the hose and water method. How do you know they are bat droppings?

If you like bats, putting up a bat house or shelter away from the dwelling might move them away from your front porch.

Though bat guano has been sold as a fertilizer and can be useful in some situations, bat droppings are also a major breeding ground for **histoplasmosis**. Histoplasmosis is a fungal disease contracted through airborne spores in bat droppings. Histoplasmosis symptoms may be anything from a mild influenza to blood abnormalities and fever, or even death. An eye condition has been linked to the bat disease histoplasmosis and can lead to blindness in those who contract it.