

# Cryptococcosis

## What is cryptococcosis and what causes it?

Cryptococcosis (KRIP-toe-cock-co-sis) is caused by the fungus, *Cryptococcus neoformans* (KRIP-toe-cock-kus knee-O-for-mans). It is found worldwide and primarily affects cats and people with weak immune systems. Cryptococcosis can result in a variety of clinical signs depending on the organ system involved.

## What animals get cryptococcosis?

Disease is most often found in cats but has been reported in cattle, dogs, ferrets, guinea pigs, horses, sheep, goats, pigs, llamas, and other animals.

*Cryptococcus* can be found in the feces of birds, especially pigeons, but also canaries, budgerigars, parrots, cockatoos, parakeets, chickens, sparrows, starlings, and turtledoves. Although birds can carry the fungus, they usually do not become sick.

## How can my animal get cryptococcosis?

Animals come in contact with the fungus in the environment. *Cryptococcus* is widespread in the soil (where it grows naturally) or is deposited through bird droppings (particularly pigeons). Transmission occurs mainly by inhalation (**aerosol**).

## How does cryptococcosis affect my animal?

The signs of illness will vary with the part of the body affected. Cryptococcosis can cause respiratory (lung) disease, skin lesions or infection of the nervous system (brain) or eyes.

Signs in animals may include sneezing, snorting, nasal discharge, eye problems, change in behavior, depression, disorientation, seizures, and difficulties with moving around. Cattle and goats can get mastitis (udder infection).

## Can I get cryptococcosis?

Yes, but typically only individuals with weakened immune systems get the disease. Exposure is primarily through inhalation (**aerosol**) of contaminated soil and not directly from animals. It usually causes lung or brain infection. Signs and symptoms seen include fever, coughing of blood, and chest pain. Visual problems, confusion or behavioral changes may occur if the brain becomes infected.

## Who should I contact, if I suspect cryptococcosis?

### In Animals –

Contact your veterinarian.

### In Humans –

Contact your physician.

## How can I protect my animal from cryptococcosis?

It is difficult to prevent exposure to cryptococcosis since it is commonly found in the environment. Avoidance and environmental control of bird droppings (especially pigeons) are important.

## How can I protect myself from cryptococcosis?

There have been no reports of direct animal-to-human transmission. People with weakened immune systems should limit their exposure to contaminated environments.

Precautions, such as wearing dust masks, should be taken when cleaning out old building/barns, since these areas may be contaminated with bird droppings. Always wash your hands thoroughly after cleaning these areas.

## For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets.

Cryptococcosis at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>

CDC. Cryptococcosis at [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/cryptococcosis\\_t.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/cryptococcosis_t.htm)



**Cryptococcosis**  
is caused by a fungus that  
may be found in dried pigeon  
droppings.

Photos from [http://www.bcgsc.ca/about/news/crypt-to\\_public](http://www.bcgsc.ca/about/news/crypt-to_public) and <http://www.astro.umd.edu/~dcr/Archives/Photos/Birds/ filenames/>