Cryptococcosis

Cryptococcosis is an uncommon illness caused by a yeast (*fungus*). The two species that cause most human infections are:

- Cryptococcus neoformans, found in soil and causes infections around the world.
- Cryptococcus gattii, originally found in Australia. It is also known as C. gattii. Since 1999, for unknown reasons, C. Gattii has caused human infections in people from British Columbia, Washington state and Oregon.

CAUSES

Cryptococci causes infection when they are breathed into the lungs. Animals, including dogs and cats, can also get sick after breathing in the yeast. Usually healthy people who inhale the Crytococcus neoformans yeast do not get symptoms. However, people with medical problems involving their immune system may get symptoms. This includes:

- People with organ transplants.
- People taking medicine that suppresses their immune system.
- Those with diseases such as diabetes , HIV and lymphoma.

Current medical evidences now suggests that people in the Pacific Northwest and without immune system problems have developed disease due to C. gattii.

SYMPTOMS

Cryptococcosis is most commonly recognized as a lung or brain lining infection (*meningitis*). However, any organ in the body can be infected. Lung infection typically causes chest pain or cough. Lung infection is usually first recognized when a chest X-ray is done. When the brain lining is infected, common symptoms include:

- Headaches.
- Confusion.
- Personality change.
- Drowsiness.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis involves testing a sample of coughed up phlegm from the lungs (*sputum*) or fluid around the spine from a spinal tap. Blood and spinal fluid can be tested for the presence of substances produced by the yeast. Medicine is available to treat this illness. Some people with a good immune system and infection limited to the lungs may not need any drug treatment.

PROGNOSIS

Infection of the linings around the brain may lead to permanent mental, visual or physical damage. About one in ten people will die from the infection. Most of this information is courtesy of the CDC.

Document Released: 11/16/2006 Document Re-Released: 05/06/2010
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