



# Health Hazards Associated with Bird and Bat Droppings

## Background

Among the fungal diseases associated with bird and bat droppings, the two most common are **Histoplasmosis** and **Cryptococcosis**. Histoplasmosis is transmitted to humans by airborne fungus spores (*H. capsulatum*) from soil contaminated by bird or bat droppings. Cryptococcosis is also transmitted to humans by airborne fungus spores (*C. neoformans*). This fungus is commonly found in debris around pigeon roosts and soil contaminated with pigeon or chicken droppings.

## Symptoms

Most people who are exposed to *H. capsulatum* or *C. neoformans* fungus never have symptoms, or their symptoms are so mild they do not seek treatment and symptoms go away on their own. In more serious cases, infections exhibit symptoms similar to many other illnesses, including cough, shortness of breath, fever, chest pain, flu-like symptoms. For those with weakened immune systems, a long-term lung infection can spread from the lungs to other parts of the body. For this reason, individuals with weakened immune systems are at the greatest risk of developing fungal disease if they become infected and should seek advice from their health care provider prior to engaging in activities that may disturb fungus spores. Always consult your physician if you think you may have been exposed, especially if your symptoms do not improve within a few days.

## Worker Protection

When an accumulation of bird or bat droppings is discovered in a building and it is necessary to remove, there are several methods for remediation to prevent it from becoming aerosolized. In general, WVU staff will follow the **WVU Standard Operating Procedures for Mold Remediation** when handling remediation activities.

- Facilities / Zone Management will notify and consult Environmental Health and Safety when bird or bat droppings are located in HVAC equipment or areas in excess of 10 square feet.
- Wet cleaning methods will be used to collect contaminated material. The material should be wetted with a water/soap solution prior to disturbing.
- If wet methods are not feasible, a HEPA vacuum will be used. Dry sweeping, dry shoveling or the use of compressed air should not be used.
- Collected material should be disposed of in a well-sealed plastic bag.
- Employees shall have the following personal protective equipment (PPE) available for their use: safety glasses/goggles, N95 respirator, disposable coveralls, and gloves.

If an employee has questions concerning the cleaning methods or the appropriate PPE, they should contact their supervisor or EHS.