



MELIOIDOSIS (WHITMORE'S DISEASE)

What is melioidosis?

Melioidosis, also called Whitmore's disease, is an infectious disease that infects humans or animals. It is caused by the bacterium *Burkholderia pseudomallei*.

Who gets melioidosis?

Anyone can develop melioidosis through direct contact with contaminated soil and water.

How is melioidosis spread?

Melioidosis develops when contaminated dust or water droplets are inhaled, when contaminated water is ingested, and ingestion or soil-contaminated food is ingested or contacted. It is rare for people to pass the disease to another person.

What are the symptoms of melioidosis?

A wide range of symptoms can occur. In localized infection, localized pain or swelling, fever, ulceration, and abscess may occur. In pulmonary infection, cough, chest pain, high fever, headache, and anorexia can occur. In bloodstream infection, fever, headache, respiratory distress, abdominal discomfort, joint pain, and disorientation can occur. In disseminated infection, fever, weight loss, stomach or chest pain, muscle or joint pain, headache, central nervous system/brain infection, and seizures can occur.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Most symptoms appear two to four weeks after exposure to the bacterium. However, symptoms can range from one day to years after exposure.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Person to person spread of the bacteria can occur with exposure to blood or body fluids of an infected person, but it is rare. Call the Delaware Division of Public Health at the number at the bottom of the page with any questions and exclusion recommendations.

What is the treatment for melioidosis?

Melioidosis is treated with antimicrobial therapy via intravenous (IV) or oral antimicrobials. IV treatment is provided for a minimum of two weeks (up to eight weeks), followed by three to six months of oral antimicrobial therapy.



Frequently Asked Questions

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of melioidosis?

Travelers should use personal protective equipment such as waterproof boots and gloves to protect against contact with soil and water in endemic areas. Thoroughly clean skin lacerations, abrasions, or burns contaminated with soil or surface water.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/melioidosis/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Traveler's Health,
<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2020/travel-related-infectious-diseases/melioidosis>