

Mucormycosis: The Basics



What is mucormycosis (zygomycosis)?

Mucormycosis (also called zygomycosis) is a rare infection caused by organisms that belong to a group of fungi called Mucoromycotina. At one time these fungi were called Zygomycota, but this scientific name has recently been changed. These fungi are typically found in the soil and in association with decaying organic matter, such as leaves, compost piles or rotten wood.

Who gets mucormycosis?

Mucormycosis is a rare infection. The infection is more common among people with weakened immune systems, but it can occur (rarely) in people who are otherwise healthy. Risk factors for developing mucormycosis include:

- Uncontrolled diabetes
- Cancer
- Organ transplant
- Neutropenia (low white blood cells)
- Skin trauma (cuts, scrapes, punctures, or burns)

How does someone get mucormycosis?

There are two main types of infection that people can get, and these depend on the route of exposure. In the pulmonary or sinus form, exposure occurs by inhaling fungal spores from the environment. These spores can cause an infection to develop in the lungs, sinuses, eyes, and face, and in rare cases can spread to the central nervous system. In the cutaneous form, the fungus can enter the skin through cuts, scrapes, puncture wounds, or other forms of trauma to the skin. Mucormycosis is not contagious and does not spread from person to person.

What are the symptoms of mucormycosis?

The symptoms of mucormycosis depend on where in the body the fungus is growing. Mucormycosis most commonly affects the sinuses or lungs. Symptoms of sinus infections include fever, headache, and sinus pain. Lung infections with the fungus can cause fever and cough symptoms.

Skin infections can develop after the fungus enters through a break in the skin due to surgery, burns, or trauma. A skin infection can look like blisters or ulcers, and the infected tissue may turn black. Other symptoms of a skin infection include fever, and tenderness, pain, heat, excessive redness, or swelling around a wound. If the infection is not treated quickly, the fungus can spread throughout the body.

How do I know if I have mucormycosis?

If you have symptoms of the infection, you should see your health care provider. A health care provider can diagnose mucormycosis by taking a sample of infected tissue and sending it to a laboratory. There, the sample will be examined under a microscope.

How is mucormycosis treated?

Mucormycosis needs to be treated with antifungal medication prescribed by a health care provider. These medications are given by mouth or through a vein. Skin infections with the fungus may require surgery to cut away the infected tissue.

For more information visit: www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/mucormycosis

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