



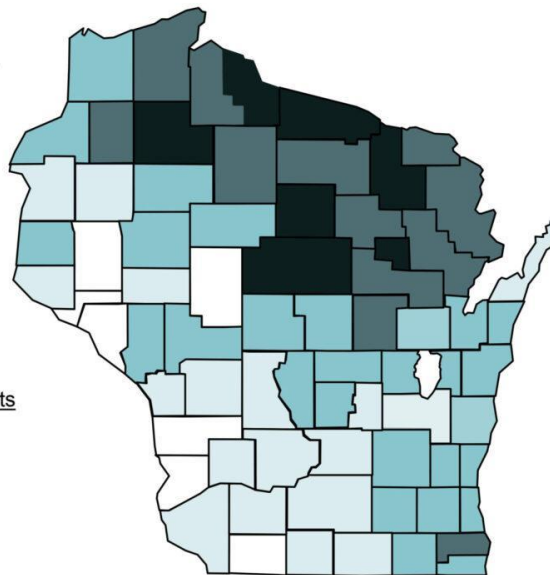
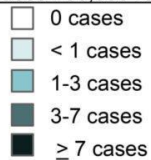
Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association

Creating tomorrow's woodlands today

## Kick Off Your Week by Learning Something New: Blastomycosis: Autumn Exposure Risk

Blastomycosis annual incidence by county of residence in Wisconsin, 2011-2020 (1,142 cases)

Annual Incidence cases/100,000 residents



Fall is an exciting season, full of recreational enjoyment, yardwork, and woodland management. It's a great time to get outdoors in Wisconsin. Many of you may start raking leaves soon, clearing brush, turning compost piles, hunting, foraging, etc. While these are all common ways in which to spend our days during this time of year, there is a potential health hazard to be aware of when performing these activities.

Blastomycosis is a rare respiratory illness caused by inhalation of fungal spores through soil disturbances that result in the spores becoming airborne. Though recognized as a soil dwelling organism, it can also become aerosolized near lakes and rivers [Blastomycosis in Wisconsin: Beyond the Outbreaks - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#). The

spores are found in sandy, moist, acidic soils, with high organic material, typically in shady wooded areas, and along waterways. They can also be found in decaying wood.

Wisconsin has the highest annual rates of illness. The CDC reports that Blastomycosis rates in Wisconsin range from 10-40 cases per 100,000 while other states only report 1-2 every 100,000. [Beware of toxic fungus uniquely endemic in Wisconsin | News | UW Health](#). Blastomycosis has been classified as a Notifiable Disease in the State of Wisconsin since 1985. A notifiable disease is any disease that is required by law to be reported to government authorities. The collation of information allows the authorities to monitor the disease and provides early warning of possible outbreaks.

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Infection can arise both in humans and in pets, though it is most common in dogs due to their sniffing and digging around at ground level. [Blastomycosis in Dogs: Signs, Symptoms, and Treatment \(akc.org\)](#). In humans, certain ethnicities may be more at risk, as well as individuals who are pregnant or have compromised immune systems. But even healthy people can become seriously ill, and symptoms may not arise until 3-15 weeks after exposure.

It is important to note that Blastomycosis symptoms mimic many other respiratory illnesses. Fatigue, difficulty breathing, cough, body aches, loss of appetite, weight loss, and cold or flu-like symptoms have been reported in conjunction with this disease [A fungal spore prevalent in Michigan's forests is a killer for some \(freep.com\)](#). If you experience these symptoms and have engaged in activities that

may have exposed you to these spores or have been in areas where spores are commonly found, please inform your physician, as they may not know to test for Blastomycosis [What is Blastomycosis? | Poison Control.](#)

Though uncommon, it is important not to be dismissive of or disregard the risk this fungus poses to outdoor enthusiasts. Just be mindful and now that you know about it, continue to spread awareness to those that may not.

## The dirt on Blastomycosis

### What is Blasto?

Blastomycosis, or “blasto,” is a disease caused by breathing in a naturally occurring fungus, often found in moist soil with rotting plants and wood. It is not found in much of the U.S. but is common in northern Wisconsin, as well as western and northern parts of the Great Lakes Basin.

When soil is disturbed, blasto fungi become airborne and are inhaled.

The fungi travel to the lungs, where they cause infection, such as pneumonia, that may spread to other parts of the body.

### Symptoms:

- dry cough, sometimes with chest pain
- lung infection (pneumonia) with fever
- weight loss
- shortness of breath
- joint pain
- unusual skin sores
- body aches

Symptoms develop 3-15 Weeks after infection

### Who is at risk?

These factors and activities can put you at higher risk...

- farming
- camping
- landscaping/ digging
- wooded areas
- hunting
- weakened immune system

### Diagnosis & Treatment

Your doctor or a specialist will diagnose the illness and start a treatment plan with prescription antifungal medicine, which may need to be taken for six months or more to prevent recurrence.

Visit [www.marshfieldclinic.org/primary-care](http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/primary-care) to learn about choosing a primary care provider.

### Awareness & Prevention

Most people who get blasto are otherwise healthy. The best way to prevent serious infection? If you have pneumonia, tell your doctor you may have been exposed to blasto.

Sources:  
• Marshfield Clinic Health System  
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Click the **green text** to learn more information

Questions? Contact the office at 715-346-4798 or [wwoa@uwsp.edu](mailto:wwoa@uwsp.edu)

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