

# NEWS RELEASE



**Date:** April 23, 2010

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**Headline:** ***Fungus found in Pacific Northwest is rare; uncommon for people to be infected***

**Subhead:** *Oregon Public Health officials tracking Cryptococcus gattii say public health threat is low*

Oregon Public Health officials today want to assure the public that the threat level of infection of *Cryptococcus gattii* is low, that infection is rare and that this fungal infection is treatable.

In 1999 a rare fungus was identified in British Columbia and in 2004, the first case of the fungus in a human was identified in the Pacific Northwest. The fungus in very rare cases causes a treatable infection in humans and animals.

The fungus, *Cryptococcus gattii*, (or *C gattii*), is a new strain of the fungus. It is airborne and is usually found in the soil and on trees. Other strains of the *C gattii* fungus have been in existence, but mostly in subtropical areas, particularly Australia.

Public health officials stress that the fungus is extremely rare and severe disease occurs primarily in people who already have immune-compromising conditions such as HIV, or who have had organ transplants.

Research into the fungus is ongoing and it is too early to release definitive data. Preliminary numbers show that since 2004 there have been about 50 people identified with the illness in Washington, Oregon and California and about 10 people have died.

The fungus has not been found to be transmitted from person to person. Symptoms include persistent cough, shortness of breath, headache, nausea, meningitis, or pneumonia.

(more)

“The fungus is rare, getting sick from the fungus is uncommon and if people do get sick there are treatments. The public health threat from the fungus is low,” said Katrina Hedberg, M.D., M.P.H., Oregon public health epidemiologist. “If people are concerned about their symptoms, they should contact their health care provider right away.”

The disease has also been indentified in some animals such as goats, sheep, dogs, cats, ferrets, elk, horses, alpacas and porpoises.