

## **Histoplasmosis in Nebraska**

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Although histoplasmosis is not a reportable disease in Nebraska, laboratory observations suggest that the incidence of this disease has increased over the past few years. (Iwen, PC and SH Hinrichs. 2000. Expanding endemic area for *Histoplasma capsulatum*? ASM News, 66: 588.)

The dimorphic fungus causing this disease, *Histoplasma capsulatum* is considered geographically restricted to the soil in an area of the United States that is an approximate

600 miles radius from the point of merger of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

The southeastern corner of Nebraska as far north as Omaha is located on the extreme northwestern edge of this endemic zone. However, numerous cases of histoplasmosis

have been diagnosed through laboratory testing of samples collected from patients residing in the central and western parts of Nebraska, suggesting that the endemic area may be larger than previously expected.

To evaluate this observation further, the NPHL has developed a molecular assay for the typing of *H. capsulatum* into strains. The ability to recognize strains of this organism will help in an epidemiological evaluation for this disease.

To make this typing program successful, we are requesting that all laboratories throughout the state submit to the NPHL any *H. capsulatum* detected. These isolates can be submitted through the Regional Laboratory courier to the "Attention of Dr. Peter Iwen". Submit the isolate on Sabouraud dextrose agar contained within a screw-capped tube. When sending, seal the tube with paraffin paper, double wrap the tube in plastic and seal tightly in a leakproof container so breakage does not occur upon transport. The *H. capsulatum* may be submitted along with the other isolates that are sent for banking.

To facilitate an epidemiological investigation, we are asking that the laboratories maintain a patient source record of the isolates detected. Any questions concerning this can be directed to Dr. Iwen at 559-7774 or by e-mail at piwen@unmc.edu.