

- Avoid activities with a high risk of Aspergillus exposure, such as, gardening, compost making, building construction, and high dust levels.
- If a high risk environment is unavoidable, it could be helpful to wear a mask that filters spores.
- Avoid skin injuries. Any wounds should be cleaned and covered with a clean sterile dressing. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, particularly after touching any objects known to harbour Aspergillus spores. Also, maintain a good habit of washing hands before meals, before touching your eyes, lips, mouth, nose or any wounds on your skin.
- It is good advice to attend every doctor's appointment, as any changes in your immune system's ability to fight off infection can be quickly spotted by blood tests (i.e. neutrophil count changes) and advice given to avoid infections before the infection is established.
- In addition, good hygiene and a healthy lifestyle will help improve your body's immune defence against Aspergillus and other infections.

If a patient has *Aspergillus* we may share that information with other hospitals. The Patient should also inform their carers of the result on admission.

How can I contact a member of the Infection Prevention & Control Team?

Tell the Clinical Nurse Manager, doctor or nurse looking after you if you would like to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team and they will contact us.

We have made every possible effort to make sure that all the information provided in this leaflet is true, accurate, complete and up to date at the time of publication.

Version 8

Reference:

Health Protection Surveillance Centre(hpsc.ie)

National Guidelines for the prevention of Nosocomial Aspergillosis

Source: Based on leaflet produced by the Aspergillus Trust (www.aspergillus.org.uk)

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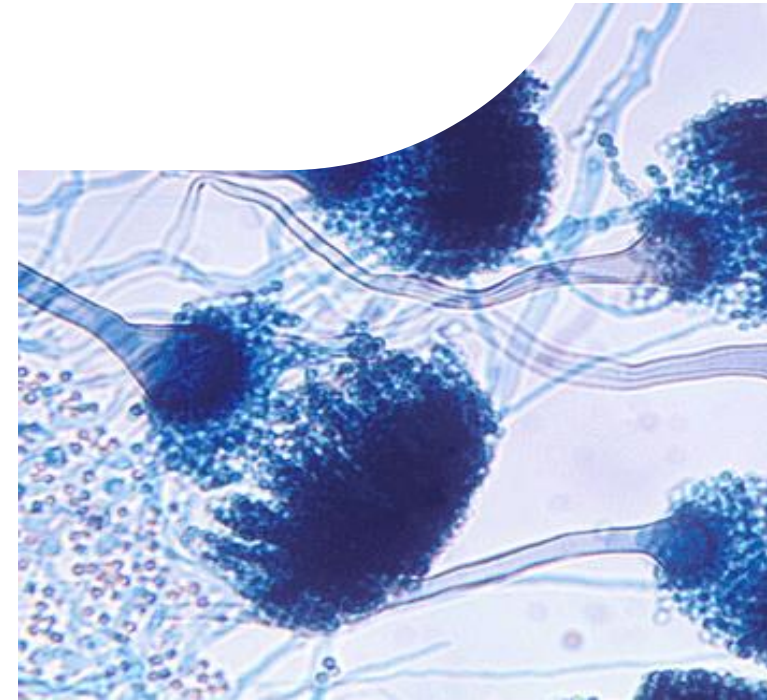
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**PATIENT
INFORMATION
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Aspergillus Prevention



What is Aspergillus?



Aspergillus species are fungi that commonly occur in soil, water, organically enriched debris and decaying vegetation. There are many species of aspergillus but only a few are associated with human disease. In healthcare setting a number of environmental risk are recognised such as exposure to construction/renovation/ demolition activities, poor maintenance of ventilation systems, also spores have been detected in water systems

How does Aspergillus spread?

Transmission by air is the commonest route. Aspergillus fungus produces millions of tiny, invisible spores small enough to be inhaled and start to settle and grow inside the airspaces of the lungs. Illnesses caused by Aspergillus infection are called aspergillosis.

Who gets Aspergillus infections?

Although the fungus is always in the air around us, the majority of people do not develop illness because their immune system is very capable of protecting them from infection when the fungus spores enters the body. In the lungs there are also special immune defence systems which combat inhaled infections.

However individuals with weakened immune systems, or long- term lung diseases which prevent the local defences from working properly, are most susceptible to serious Aspergillus infections.

So what increases the risk of serious Aspergillus infection?

Illnesses that weaken your immune response such as:

- Immune suppressing diseases: such as Chronic Granulomatous Disorder, leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma
- Cancer patients on chemotherapy treatment
- Long term medications which suppress the immune system (common ones include corticosteroids, cyclosporin).
- Organ transplant recipients (particularly solid organ i.e. heart, lung), bone marrow transplant recipients, and those with illnesses caused by the immune system attacking their own body structures (auto-immune disease)
- Patients on mechanical ventilation
- Patients with extensive burns
- Patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
- Cystic fibrosis patients should also be considered.

This list covers the more common risks, but not all risks. Medical advice must be sought from your doctor.

How can I prevent Aspergillus infection?

In hospitals individuals at high risk of acquiring Aspergillus infections may need to be nursed in special rooms with air dust filters and ventilation systems, which minimise the spores in the air. Where these are not available, windows should be closed/ sealed during building work. Antifungal medication may also be given to vulnerable patients.

- Aspergillus cannot be completely avoided in the environment but the risk of infection can be reduced for susceptible individuals by:
- Avoiding places where Aspergillus spores are abundant – forests, gardens, compost heaps, damp bark or wood chippings, grain stores, rotting vegetation, dead leaves, and construction or renovation areas.
- Removing any potted and ornamental plants in the household. The household environment and furniture surfaces should be kept clean, dust-free and dry to minimise the accumulation of fungus and moulds.
- Certain food items, such as spices and herbs, which are usually found to contain Aspergillus spores, should be avoided, unless already cooked by someone else.