



Aspergillosis

Aspergillosis is a condition caused by breathing in aspergillus mould.

Most people who breathe in the mould do not get ill, as the body's immune system destroys the spores. But it can develop in people with an existing lung condition or a weakened immune system.

There are different types of aspergillosis - most affect the lungs and cause breathing difficulties.

What causes aspergillosis?

Aspergillosis is caused by breathing in small particles, called spores, of aspergillus in the air. Aspergillus is a common type of fungus (mould).

The mould can be found in:

- soil, compost and rotting leaves
- plants, trees and crops
- dust and bedding
- damp buildings
- air conditioning systems and uncovered attic water tanks

Some older houses may not have covered water tanks, or the covers may not be fixed. If you live in a house with an old water tank, it's worth checking that it has a cover and the cover fits securely.

You cannot catch aspergillosis from another person or from animals.

Find out [how to stop aspergillus growing in your home](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/indoor-air-pollution/improving-air-quality#condensation) ([blf.org.uk/support-for-you/indoor-air-pollution/improving-air-quality#condensation](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/indoor-air-pollution/improving-air-quality#condensation)).

Who is at risk of aspergillosis?

Aspergillosis is rare in healthy people. You're at risk if:

- you have a long-term lung condition like [asthma](https://www.blf.org.uk/asthma) ([blf.org.uk/asthma](https://www.blf.org.uk/asthma)), [cystic fibrosis](https://www.blf.org.uk/cystic-fibrosis) ([blf.org.uk/cystic-fibrosis](https://www.blf.org.uk/cystic-fibrosis)), [sarcoidosis](https://www.blf.org.uk/sarcoidosis) ([blf.org.uk/sarcoidosis](https://www.blf.org.uk/sarcoidosis)) or [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](https://www.blf.org.uk/copd) ([blf.org.uk/copd](https://www.blf.org.uk/copd))
- you have a weakened immune system, for example if you have had chemotherapy or an organ transplant
- you have had lung [tuberculosis \(TB\)](https://www.blf.org.uk/tb) ([blf.org.uk/tb](https://www.blf.org.uk/tb))
- you have severe flu that requires artificial ventilation

What are the symptoms of aspergillosis?

Symptoms of aspergillosis include:

- shortness of breath
- a cough – which may bring up blood or mucus (which can become very thick)
- wheeze (a whistling sound when breathing)
- a high temperature of 38C or above
- weight loss

If you already have a lung condition, your existing symptoms can get worse.

How is aspergillosis diagnosed?

If you have a lung condition and your symptoms are worse despite your usual treatment or you've had a cough for more than 3 weeks, go to see your GP. It may take some time to rule out other causes and get a diagnosis, and you may need to see a specialist or have tests such as:

- [X-rays and scans](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathing-tests/other-tests#imaging) ([blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathing-tests/other-tests#imaging](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathing-tests/other-tests#imaging))
- blood tests including for aspergillus antibodies
- tests on a sample of your mucus
- [a bronchoscopy](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathing-tests/other-tests#look) ([blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathing-tests/other-tests#look](https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathing-tests/other-tests#look)) to look inside your lungs

Allergic bronchopulmonary aspergillosis (ABPA)

This is caused by an allergic reaction to the aspergillus mould. You may need to take steroid and antifungal medicines for some months.

Chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA)

This is a long-term lung infection which may require long term (possibly life-long) treatment with antifungal medicines.

Aspergilloma

This caused by aspergillus growing into a ball inside the lung. This usually occurs in areas of the lung damaged by previous infections, especially TB. Aspergillomas are often linked to chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA). You may need to have surgery to the remove the ball, often after antifungal therapy.

Invasive pulmonary aspergillus (IPA)

This is a life-threatening infection in people who have a weakened immune system. They will be treated in hospital with antifungal medicines given directly into a vein.

Preventing aspergillosis

It's not possible to completely avoid aspergillus mould. But there are things you can do to reduce the risk of catching aspergillosis:

- avoid places where aspergillus mould is often found
- close your windows if there's construction work or digging outside
- wear a face mask in dusty places and consider using an air purifier
- dry your laundry outside or in a tumble dryer – avoid drying it in your bedroom or living space

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Useful resources:

[Aspergillosis Patients and Carers](https://www.aspergillosis.org) ([aspergillosis.org](https://www.aspergillosis.org)) – information and support for people with aspergillosis.

[Aspergillus & Aspergillosis Website](https://www.aspergillus.org.uk) ([aspergillus.org.uk](https://www.aspergillus.org.uk)) – information on aspergillus mould for health care professionals and patients.

[National Aspergillosis Centre, UHSM](https://www.mft.nhs.uk/wythenshawe/services/respiratory-and-allergy/national-aspergillosis-centre/) ([mft.nhs.uk/wythenshawe/services/respiratory-and-allergy/national-aspergillosis-centre/](https://www.mft.nhs.uk/wythenshawe/services/respiratory-and-allergy/national-aspergillosis-centre/)) – the centre for aspergillosis, based in Manchester.

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline will cost the same as a local call.

helpline@blf.org.uk

[blf.org.uk](https://www.blf.org.uk)

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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **[blf.org.uk](https://www.blf.org.uk)**