



Dr S Craven

ACUTE BENIGN PULMONARY HISTOPLASMOSIS (ABPH)



Acute benign pulmonary histoplasmosis is a fungal disease caused by the conidia of *Histoplasma capsulatum* which live in bat droppings, commonly in caves and disused mines. Inevitably the visitors disturb the guano, and inhale the conidia in the dust. About a week later they develop fever, malaise, shortage of breath and unproductive cough. Chest x-rays at this time show a “snow-storm” appearance.

Cave exploration is not a solitary experience. If a group of speleologists explores a cave, and complains of the above symptoms a week later, the diagnosis is ABPH. The problem for the family doctor is that the patients often are not aware that their friends are similarly affected, attend different doctors, and are therefore unable to give a full history. ABPH is not a common disease; and the family physician has probably not seen a case.

At medical school I was taught that histoplasmosis is a disease of the tropics and sub-tropics. Our experience in the Cape has disproved this claim. In 1977 there was a point-source outbreak from the old Guano Mine on the De Hoop nature reserve east of Bredasdorp. A decade later all had long since made complete recoveries, but with micro calcification on chest x-rays which may cause confusion in later life if the previous ABPH is not taken into account. We have also seen cases from the caves north of Oudtshoorn.

ABPH is much more common in the former Transvaal, where a point-source outbreak was reported to me during September 2018.

Our experience in the Cape is that, provided the patients’ immune systems are intact, they make full spontaneous recoveries in about a month. Anti-fungal therapy is not indicated. If the immune system is compromised, e.g. from HIV. The patient will be so ill that s(he) will need in-patient treatment by a specialist physician.

Further information, including references, will be found in my

Guidelines for the outpatient treatment of acute symptomatic pulmonary histoplasmosis in cavers. South African Journal of Sports Medicine (2003) 15. (2), 27 – 28.

And The Epidemiology of acute benign pulmonary histoplasmosis (= cave disease). Cave and Karst Science (2013) 40. (3), 133 -140.

I will be pleased to e-mail these papers on request.

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