

# Melioidosis

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is melioidosis?

Melioidosis, also called Whitmore's disease, is an infection caused by bacteria that are found in contaminated soil or water. It is spread to people and animals through direct contact with the contaminated source. It is mostly found in tropical areas, but was found in the environment along the Gulf Coast of Mississippi in 2022, and experts are looking to see how widespread the bacteria are in the United States. Many types of animals can get melioidosis such as sheep, goats, pigs, horses, cats, dogs, and cattle.

### How is melioidosis spread?

People can get melioidosis through direct contact with contaminated soil and water, such as when they breathe in dust or water droplets that contain the bacteria, ingest contaminated water or soil-contaminated food, or have contact with contaminated soil, especially through breaks in the skin. It is very rare for people to get the disease from another person.

### Who gets melioidosis?

Although healthy people may get melioidosis, people with underlying health problems are at higher risk. Major risk factors are diabetes, liver disease, kidney disease, cancer or other disease that weakens the immune system, thalassemia, and chronic lung diseases.

### What are the symptoms of melioidosis?

There is a wide range of symptoms. There are several different types of melioidosis infection, each with their own set of symptoms.

- **Skin:** pain or swelling where the bacteria entered the body (localized infection), fever, skin sore, wound, or abscess
- **Lungs:** cough, chest pain, high fever, headache, loss of appetite
- **Bloodstream:** fever, headache, difficulty breathing, abdominal discomfort, joint pain, confusion
- **Widespread:** fever, weight loss, stomach or chest pain, muscle or joint pain, headache, central nervous system/brain infection, seizures

Symptoms usually occur two to four weeks after being exposed to the bacteria. Some cases have happened months or years after exposure.

### How is melioidosis diagnosed?

To diagnose this infection, a health care provider will ask you about your symptoms, perform a physical exam, and may send samples such as blood or swabs to a lab to confirm if the bacteria are present.

## **What is the treatment for melioidosis?**

Melioidosis can be treated with the use of appropriate medication. Treatment generally starts with antibiotics given through an IV for at least two weeks, followed by antibiotic pills for at least three months. (NOTE – it is very important to finish your antibiotics, even if you begin to feel better, unless otherwise directed by your health care provider.)

## **How can melioidosis be prevented?**

In areas where the disease is widespread, you can reduce your risk by taking a few actions:

- Avoid contact with soil and standing water if you have diabetes or chronic kidney disease.
- Wear waterproof boots when walking in wet soil, pooled water or mud.
- Wear gloves while gardening or working with soil.
- Use waterproof coverings on wounds or sores. Avoid getting water or soil that could be contaminated into wounds.

## **Where can I get more information?**

- Your health care provider
- Your local health department
- NJ Department of Health [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [www.cdc.gov/melioidosis/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/melioidosis/index.htm)

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a health care provider.

Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Cleveland Clinic.