

Cryptococcosis

Cryptococcus spp. are fungi that live in soil and plant debris, including numerous types of trees. Most cryptococcal species are non-infectious, but a handful, notably *C. neoformans* and *C. gattii*, when inhaled, are pathogenic for humans and a variety of mammals, including dogs, cats, goats, elk and ferrets. The main clinical presentations are pneumonia or meningitis. Person-to-person transmission does not occur.

Cryptococcus neoformans has long been identified in humans with immunosuppressive conditions, especially AIDS. Before 1999, *C. gattii* infection seemed to be pretty much limited to the tropics. During 1999, *C. gattii* began appearing in animals and humans on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Beginning in 2004, it started appearing among mainland British Columbia residents who had no exposure to Vancouver Island. In December 2004, a case of human *C. gattii* infection was reported in Oregon, associated with an outbreak on Vancouver Island and in

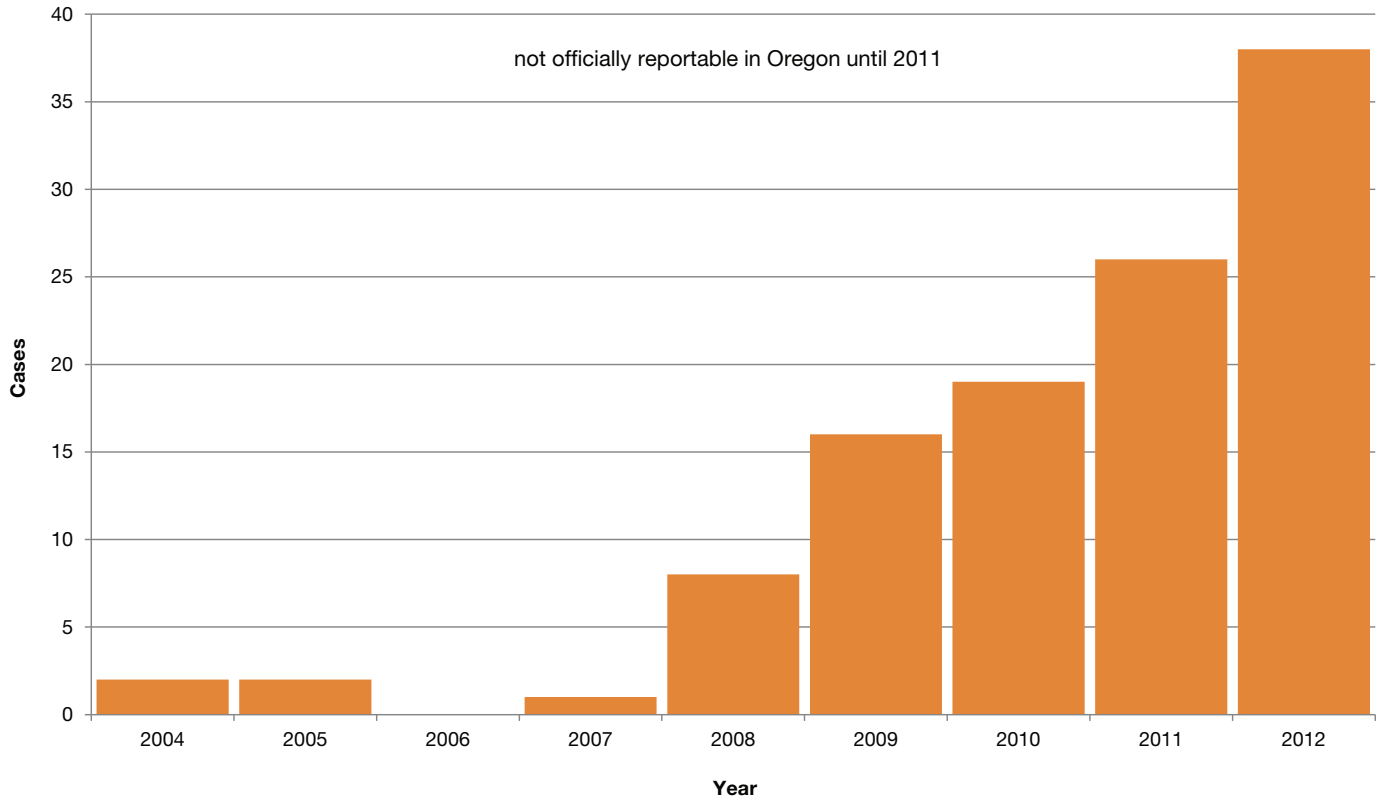
mainland British Columbia, Canada. A second *C. gattii* case was reported in Oregon in 2005, and 12 more cases were reported in 2006 and 2008. *Cryptococcus* became officially reportable in Oregon August 19, 2011.

Studies from British Columbia and elsewhere showed a median incubation period of 6–7 months, with a range of 2–13 months. In addition to testing human specimens, to localize the environmental reservoirs we also test animals and environments where animals are infected with *C. gattii* (they travel less than humans). The bottom line is that *Cryptococcus gattii* appears to be established in Oregon. Previously healthy persons appear to be at some risk, but most human cases of infection with either cryptococcal species have been immunocompromised or otherwise suffered from chronic illness. Treatment with extended use of antifungal agents (6 months or more) is recommended. For current treatment information, see guidelines published by the Infectious Disease Society of America: www.idsociety.org/Index.aspx

Prevention

Regrettably, practical methods for preventing cryptococcosis have not been identified. Patients with cryptococcosis can be helped with early diagnosis and treatment with antifungal drugs.

Cryptococcosis by year: Oregon, 2004–2012



Cryptococcosis by age and sex: Oregon, 2012

