

## **Script – Broadcast – The dirt on blastomycosis**

### **INTRO**

Five years ago, Kendall Idle's life turned upside down when he was on his way to work. He suddenly passed out and rolled his car into an empty field.

Idle broke his back, a severe injury which he eventually recovered from. But while he was trapped in his car until help arrived, Idle inhaled some fungal spores which were present in the field.

**((SOT))**

### **Kendall Idle, blastomycosis survivor**

"As I was recovering from my broken back, they just took root in my lungs," he says. "Right around the time my back was healing up, my lungs started acting up." (:11)

It turns out that Idle developed a serious case of blastomycosis, a disease caused by the fungus, *Blastomyces dermatitidis*, that lives in the environment, and grows in moist soil and decomposing matter like wood or leaves. Blastomycosis is mostly found in the Midwest and the South, especially around the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and the Great Lakes. It's most likely to occur during the fall and early winter months.

### **VO**

Although most people who breathe in the spores don't get sick, some people will develop symptoms like fever and cough, and the infection can sometimes become serious if not treated. Nicole Pirlot, an infection preventionist for OSF HealthCare, says signs and symptoms normally are vague and are often treated first as a respiratory illness or pneumonia before being diagnosed as blastomycosis. Pirlot adds that about 50% of cases are asymptomatic. And of those cases, most of those will resolve without treatment. Symptoms usually appear between three weeks and three months after a person breathes in the fungal spores. Individuals who are immunocompromised or have underlying illness, such as diabetes, tend to get severely sicker, and those people may end up needing hospitalization.

**((SOT))**

### **Nicole Pirlot, an infection preventionist for OSF HealthCare**

"The signs and symptoms are typical respiratory illness, fevers, cough that is dry. As the disease progresses, it will show cavitory lesions on a chest X ray or a CT exam," she says. "And then you can also get chest pain with your cough. It can spread into other organs or cause skin lesions." (:27)

### **TAG**

Outbreaks of blastomycosis are rare. But in 2023, health officials in Escanaba, Michigan, saw more than 120 cases of the fungal infection that was linked to a paper mill in town. More than a dozen people were hospitalized, and one death was reported.

Most people who have symptoms from blastomycosis are treated with prescription antifungal medication. Depending on the severity of the infection and the patient's immune system, treatment can last from six months to a year.